THE CIVIL WAR CAREER OF
ANDREW GREGG CURTIN,
GOVERNOR OF PENNSYLVANIA

REBECCA GIFFORD ALBRIGHT

PART III
CHAPTER IV
"THE NECESSITY OF BEING READY"

One of the most important activities of Andrew Curtin's career as Civil War governor was the procurement and training of troops. The success with which he fulfilled this obligation is particularly admirable in the light of the animosity which existed between him and both Secretaries of War, Simon Cameron and Edwin M. Stanton.

The Cameron-Curtin feud, which had split the Republican Party of Pennsylvania, assumed national significance over the issue of Lincoln's Cabinet appointments. Cameron, who had been promised a Cabinet post, wanted the Treasury Department, but got the War Department instead. Curtin and Alexander McClure had opposed Cameron for any post and had made their views known to Lincoln. This agitation, in addition to the bitterness engendered over the previous decade of Pennsylvania politics, foreshadowed the difficulty Lincoln would have in reconciling the two Pennsylvania Republicans. For the most part, the disputes which arose between Cameron and Curtin were settled through the mediation of Lincoln and McClure, who although not sympathetic toward Cameron, was at least on a pleasant personal basis with him.

Lincoln, who was only too familiar with the Curtin-Cameron antagonism, understood the feud, "... refereed their disputes and shared patronage carefully between them." On many occasions,

2 Davis, 189; Russell, 245.
3 Sandburg, III, 89; Hesseltine, 150.
Curtin simply by-passed the War Department in registering complaints or requesting favors, going directly to Lincoln instead. Such activity understandably added to Cameron's resentment of the Governor.4

Curtin's relations with the War Department did not improve with Edwin M. Stanton's replacement of Cameron as Secretary in January 1862. Stanton, a Democrat whose anti-slavery views differed from those of Curtin,5 seems to have lost ground whenever Lincoln intervened in Stanton's disputes with the Pennsylvania governor.6 Stanton especially disliked Curtin because of the latter's interference in matters bearing on Stanton's generals. On one occasion, in October 1862, Curtin objected to an order, issued on General McClellan's recommendation, concerning the appointment of officers. When Lincoln referred Curtin's protest to Stanton, the Secretary replied that Curtin's protest was

... ill advised, revolutionary and tends to excite discontent and mutiny in the army and in my judgment should be severely rebuked by the President.

Lincoln in turn wrote to the Governor: "I wish I could see Gov. Curtin." 7 A further indication of Stanton's dislike of Curtin was his remark upon being informed of Curtin's re-election in 1863: "Yes, Pennsylvania must be a damned loyal state to give such a victory to Curtin." 8

If Lincoln seems to have favored Curtin over Stanton, he was wise enough to conceal his favoritism in his communications to Stanton. At times, the President made a request of Stanton with the understanding that he could refuse to carry it out, giving the Secretary a kind of veto power.9

The President had good reason to avoid alienating Andrew Curtin. Not only was Curtin a political ally of Lincoln;10 he was also

4 Curtin's habit of appealing directly to Lincoln became even more pronounced after Stanton took over the War Department. R. P. Basler, ed., Abraham Lincoln Collected Works (New Brunswick, 1953), IV, 552; V, 29, 111, 206, 239, 380, 400; VI, 464; VII, 2, 97, 455; VIII, 41, 44, 84-85.
5 J. G. Randall, Lincoln, the President (New York, 1945-1955), II, 61; Heseltine, 196.
7 Basler, V, 482.
8 McClure, Lincoln and Men of War Times, 260-261.
9 Sandburg, III, 505. Lincoln's note to Stanton regarding the term of the Pennsylvania Reserves is an example: "Let them have their own way upon that, unless it would cause very considerable injury." Basler, VII, 249-250.
10 See WPHM, XLVIII, 38.
in a position to contribute large numbers of troops to the Union cause. Curtin had early taken a stand in favor of readiness in the event of war.\textsuperscript{11} After the fall of Fort Sumter, Curtin met in Washington with Lincoln, General Winfield Scott, Cameron and McClure. Upon conferring on the number of troops to be furnished by Pennsylvania, Curtin returned to Harrisburg to summon the state legislature and to prepare for the mobilization of the state militia.\textsuperscript{12}

The complex military organization of the North was the cause of many misunderstandings between the governors and the national government, but because it required the governors' co-operation in forwarding troops to the national army, the system contributed to the strength of the governors' position in the early months of the war.

Prior to the outbreak of the War, the national government had a regular army force of only about 16,000. Congress was not in session in April 1861, so President Lincoln built from this small nucleus an enlarged regular army, called on the state militia, and enrolled a volunteer emergency army, all without Congressional consent.\textsuperscript{13} In addition to the national regular army, the federal government requisitioned emergency military units, to be procured by the state; with them regimental officers were to be appointed by the state. Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase had recognized the wisdom of permitting state regiments to retain their identity by carrying state names.\textsuperscript{14}

The volunteer regiments of the emergency national army were raised by the governors in answer to calls put forth either by Lincoln or the War Department. Although the governors had full authority over the troops thus called,\textsuperscript{15} they were eager to have the national government relieve them of the burden of maintaining them. Civil War historian Allan Nevins describes the governors' behavior in *The Improvised War*:

\textsuperscript{11} Lincoln was aware of Curtin's preparations for war, and on April 6, 1861, wrote Curtin that the "necessity of being ready increases." On April 10, Lincoln ordered Cameron to fill Curtin's request for a drill officer. Basler, IV, 324, 326.


\textsuperscript{14} Nevins, 168.

Aflame with patriotic zeal, a number of governors had encouraged the enlistment of troops beyond reasonable limits, and were under pressure to put them on the firing line. Legislators had created camps and were feeding and drilling them at great expense; the men were eager to fight and other groups at home were eager to take their places.\(^\text{16}\)

In addition to the regular national army and the emergency national army, the Union relied on state militias to repel invasions of the states. The initiative in forming state troops was taken by towns and individuals. In Pennsylvania, such companies had to consist of at least eighty-three officers and men, who then presented themselves to the Governor to be accepted into state training and service, at state expense.\(^\text{17}\)

The state executives had two means of procuring soldiers: appeals for volunteers and conscription. Although Pennsylvania resorted to conscription in 1862, and the national government in 1863, most of the state quotas were filled in the early months of the War by recruiting.

Recruiting troops was a prerogative of the state governors, but Secretary of War Cameron ignored this fact in sending his own recruiting agents into the states, to the exasperation of Governor Curtin and his fellow governors.\(^\text{18}\) In Pennsylvania, Curtin found that he was called upon to raise fifty-four regiments, but that Cameron had authorized fifty-eight other men to raise fifty-eight of their own regiments. The result of this competition for volunteers was that, after a month of recruiting, there were seventy regiments being recruited, and not one was full.\(^\text{19}\) Although other governors suffered from this injustice, Curtin made the most effective protest, in appealing directly to Lincoln to stop the overlapping recruiting.\(^\text{20}\) Cameron resented Curtin's appeal to the President, but by September 1862, all Pennsylvania volunteer organizations were placed under Curtin's supervision.\(^\text{21}\) Following the incident, Massachusetts' governor, John A. Andrew, who also had protested irregular recruiting, wrote to Curtin:

"I trust we may congratulate ourselves that this source of trouble is to be dried up at the fountain head."\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{	ext{16}}\) Nevins, 169. On April 21, 1861, Curtin telegraphed to J. Edgar Thomson of the P.R.R. that he could not control the troops because they had already been sworn into federal service and should be forwarded to Washington. Kamm, 33.

\(^{17}\) Levin, 5-6.

\(^{18}\) Nevins, 233; Hesseltine, 185; Levin, 6.

\(^{19}\) Hesseltine, 184; Meneely, 185; Levin, 6.

\(^{20}\) Nevins, 234; H. Pearson, *Life of John A. Andrew, Governor of Massachusetts 1861-1865* (Boston, 1904), I, 282; Meneely, 211.

\(^{21}\) Meneely, 213; Nevins, 235.

\(^{22}\) Pearson, I, 283.
One of Curtin's most important acts as governor was the result of another clash with Simon Cameron. The formation of the Pennsylvania Reserves in May 1861 followed Cameron's refusal to accept the 25,000 additional troops called for by Curtin without authorization from Washington. Because communications between Washington and Harrisburg were interrupted after the fall of Sumter, Curtin requested General Robert Patterson, commander of the Department of Pennsylvania, to request an additional 25,000 troops from Pennsylvania. Curtin then issued the call, and when communications were restored Washington revoked the order. Rather than dampen the war spirit of the volunteers by sending them home, Curtin called on the state legislature to authorize a Pennsylvania Reserve Corps of fifteen regiments, to be fully officered, armed and trained at Camp Curtin, outside of Harrisburg. The legislature authorized a $3,000,000 loan to finance the Reserves. Curtis's wisdom in providing for the training and equipping of the Pennsylvania Reserves was vindicated by the role of the Corps in defending Washington after the first battle of Bull Run. Cameron's transportation assistant, Thomas A. Scott, had seen the danger of permitting the retirement from Washington of the three-months' men whose terms of enlistment had expired, and on his own authority wired Curtin to send the Reserves, the first soldiers to arrive in Washington to defend the capital. The performance of the Pennsylvania Reserves was a tribute to Curtin's foresight. As Allan Nevins has written:

Curtin in his insistence on a body of trained reserve regiments saw further ahead than Washington ... Curtin's fourteen [sic] reserve regiments were to do some of the best fighting of the War.

The Reserves, which could be mustered into the service of the national government if needed, were incorporated into the Army of the Potomac.

Despite the personal antagonism which marred Curtin's official dealings with Secretary of War Stanton, the Governor continued his

23 A. K. McClure, *Life and Services of Andrew G. Curtin* (Harrisburg, 1895), 24-26; Russell, 240; Meneely, 144; Nevins, 170; Davis, 180.
24 T. A. Scott to A. G. Curtin, 21 July 1861, *Telegraphic Messages Received at the State Executive Offices, Book II*, 141, 149, 158, Pennsylvania State Archives (hereinafter referred to as TMR-PSA), quoted in Kamm, 44-45.
25 Nevins, 173, 416; Davis, 81; McClure, *Life and Services of Andrew G. Curtin*, 27.
vigorous activity in recruiting troops throughout 1862-63. The volume of urgent pleas from Stanton and Lincoln to Curtin indicates that they relied extensively on Curtin's readiness and ability to provide troops in an emergency. In a telegram of 18 June 1862 to Governors Curtin, Sprague and Andrew, Stanton wrote: "We are in need of troops. How many can you send on immediately?" At times, Lincoln, instead of Stanton, appealed to the governors as he did to Curtin on 12 August 1862: "It is very important for some regiments to arrive here at once. What lack you from us? What can we do to expedite matters? Answer." Curtin replied that three regiments would leave as soon as transportation was ready and that 13,000 men would organize as soon as possible.

Curtin's methods of recruiting troops included capitalizing on his record as the "Soldiers' Friend," a dubious claim in the minds of some of Curtin's critics, but an apparently useful technique. Curtin issued countless proclamations through the press and public addresses, eloquently exhorting men to dedicate themselves to the preservation of the Union. In some instances, Curtin's personality must have helped him recruit new troops. Even after the battle of Antietam in September 1862, when volunteering had fallen off drastically, Curtin hoped to win troops by personally appealing to the men: "There is but one course to pursue I must go along and ask men to volunteer to follow me— . . . ."

As the War entered its second year, the governors found it more difficult to raise volunteer troops. By the summer of 1862, the North had few decisive victories to its credit, and it was evident that the War would not be a short one. Andrew Curtin and the War Department began to argue over length of service, quotas and bounties, with a resulting lack of troops coming from Pennsylvania. Men who would have been willing to enlist for nine or twelve months were not willing to answer Stanton's call for three-year men.

Stanton outwitted himself, however, when he foolishly closed the recruiting offices of the loyal states in April 1862. A month later, Stanton called for troops to accompany McClellan to Richmond, and Curtin replied that he could not supply the needed troops because of Stanton's order closing the recruiting office. Kamm, 134; Hesseltine, 194.

Pearson, II, 28.

Basler, V, 368.


Curtin sensed the men's reluctance to sign for three years, and tried to get Lincoln and Stanton to accept men for shorter terms. On 23 July 1862, Lincoln wrote to Stanton: "If we do not take them after what has happened, we shall fail perhaps to get any on other terms from Pennsylvania."
Lincoln's call for 300,000 troops in July and another 300,000 in August 1862 was accompanied by an order instructing the governors to inaugurate a state draft if troops could not be raised by volunteering. Such a measure was unpopular not only with the general public, but also with the governors, who didn't want to alienate voters just before the fall elections.\textsuperscript{31} Andrew Curtin decided to initiate a state draft in August 1862, and at his request, Lincoln persuaded Alexander McClure to direct it. McClure obtained an extension of the 15 August deadline by which regiments were to be filled. He then managed to postpone further draft calls until after the October elections, using juggled draft statistics in doubtful districts.\textsuperscript{32}

When the draft went into effect on 16 October 1862, most of the state accepted it peaceably. There was, however, much opposition to the draft in the anthracite coal regions of Schuylkill County, where the "Molly Maguires," a secret society of miners, led the resistance.\textsuperscript{33} On 22 October, Curtin appealed to Stanton for authority to use the state militia to put down the resistance to the draft. Stanton answered, giving Curtin authority to use any military force in the state to enforce conscription.\textsuperscript{34} The draft of 1862, although not officially a national undertaking, was paid for by the federal government and was, in effect, the result of a Presidential order.\textsuperscript{35}

On 3 March 1863, the national government passed a Conscription Act. The act deprived the governors of one of their most effective bargaining tools, by making them "mere recruiting agents of a national army."\textsuperscript{36} The National Conscription Act created no less furor in Pennsylvania than had the 1862 state draft. It became a major issue in the gubernatorial campaign of 1863 when the Democrats nominated Judge John Woodward of the State Supreme Court to run against Basler, V, 339; Kamm, 152-155. The War Department informed Curtin on September 29, 1862, of the "extremely reduced condition of the Regiments from your State . . . necessity that exists for filling up these old organizations." Lewis Richmond, Antietam, letter, to Andrew Curtin, Slifer-Dill Papers.

31 Hesseltine, 277-278.
33 Hesseltine, 279, 293; McClure, \textit{Ibid.}, 545; Russell, 278; Levin, 8.
35 On 18 September 1863, Curtin wrote to Lincoln to request that the government pay the draft expenses or Curtin would suffer in the election. Lincoln replied that all claims had been paid "except a few of questionable fairness . . ." Basler, VI, 477.
Curtin. The constitutionality of the 1863 Conscription Act had been questioned before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in Kneedler vs. Lane. Woodward, still on the Supreme Court, could not make any statement regarding the act, but Republicans declared that the State Court had no authority to pass on a national law in any event. The political content of the Court changed in the middle of the case, and in a reversal of a previous decision the Conscription Act was upheld in a decision of 16 January 1864.\(^\text{37}\)

By November 1863, it was apparent that the Conscription Act was not successful. Curtin wrote to Lincoln proposing a plan for raising volunteers through state authorities, but Lincoln delayed his reply, and it was too near the January 5 draft date to try for volunteers. Although the national draft was not a success in itself, it did enable the national government to force the more vigorous enlistment of troops by the governors.\(^\text{38}\)

The change of the national government's policy of procurement of troops indicates a growing tendency away from state control towards centralized authority. Whereas the governors had done the pushing for vigorous action in the early months of the War, and had more or less forced their volunteer regiments upon the War Department, the situation was quite different by 1863. The National Conscription Act was evidence that the national authorities were assuming more control over troop procurement and were using the state executives to implement the policy.

At the outbreak of the War, neither the state nor the national government was prepared to train and equip, clothe and feed, the large numbers of soldiers needed to put down the Rebellion. The federal government, presumably, was responsible for providing for the needs of soldiers mustered into the national army, while the state was to provide for the needs of the state militia.\(^\text{39}\) In some instances, the state provided for its regiments in the national emergency army and was to be reimbursed by the federal government.

Much of Curtin's work in providing for the needs of troops was in issuing contracts for blankets, shoes and uniforms. Because of the emergency of the situation in 1861, many contracts were awarded hastily, resulting in faulty provisions. Curtin was severely criticized and was accused of personally speculating and defrauding the citizens

\(^{38}\) Hesseltine, Lincoln and the War Governors, 306-307, 340; Basler, VII, 57-58.  
in awarding contracts. Curtin himself initiated an investigation which relieved the state authorities of suspicion in the equipment frauds.

In addition to the military camps established by the state for the training of recruits, Governor Curtin issued proclamations urging local groups to train themselves. In one such proclamation, issued 4 September 1862, Curtin asked for a suspension of business after three o’clock p.m. to allow time for the organization and drill of local companies. Although the appeal was an emergency measure in the face of threatened invasion, it indicated the nature of the sacrifices Curtin expected of citizens in defense of the state.

The importance of transportation and communication during the Civil War can hardly be exaggerated. The burden of transportation of troops, industrial products, supplies, and wartime leaders fell chiefly on the railroads. Andrew Curtin, as well as the War Department, was fortunate in having secured the services of Thomas A. Scott, Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Central Railroad, the most extensive of the consolidated lines. Before the fall of Fort Sumter in April 1861, Andrew Curtin had summoned Scott to Harrisburg to assist in perfecting railroad and telegraph lines. Later that month, Simon Cameron called Scott to Washington to assist in putting into order the railroad line between Annapolis and Washington. Scott was later put in charge of all government railways and telegraphs and became Assistant Secretary of War under Cameron.

40 Pittsburgh Post, 15 Sept. 1863, 1; Davis, 182-183; Heseltine, Lincoln and the War Governors, 172; Russell, 241. Many letters complaining of the inadequacy and inferiority of food and equipment were sent to Curtin, not only by the soldiers but also by observers. One such observer in a Philadelphia camp reported that nothing had been provided except tents, and that many of the counties even failed to provide their boys with straw on which to sleep. The observer further reported that the boys supplemented their scanty rations of salt pork and crackers with packages from home. C. Pascal, Philadelphia, letter, 30 Oct. 1862, to Andrew Curtin, Slifer-Dill Papers.

41 Davis, 187; Heseltine, loc. cit.
44 C. Fish, “Northern Railroads, April, 1861,” American Historical Review, XXII (July, 1917), 782, 784.
45 J. M. Book, Northern Rendezvous (Harrisburg, 1951), 44; Kamm, 34; Levin, 3; Meneely, 126.
46 D. H. Bates, Lincoln in the Telegraph Office (New York, 1907), 20; Meneely, 126; Nevins, 85; Leech, 67, 84; Kamm writes that Curtin at first refused to release Scott because of emergency conditions at Harrisburg and did so only after receiving three messages from Cameron, asking for Scott’s release. Kamm, 34-35.
Thomas A. Scott worked closely with Curtin on many occasions, arranging telegraphic communications to report enemy movements,\(^\text{47}\) transporting Curtin to and from Harrisburg, intervening on Curtin's behalf in the War Department, and transporting Pennsylvania troops.\(^\text{48}\) Because of his position as both Assistant Secretary of War and Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Central Railroad (later the Pennsylvania Railroad), it was almost inevitable that Scott should be the object of criticism.\(^\text{49}\) While the Assistant Secretary may have favored the Pennsylvania Central, his contribution to the Union effort was sufficiently great to offset this favoritism.\(^\text{50}\) In his book, *War Department, 1861*, A. Howard Meneely writes: "Scott was one of the few men in the War Department in 1861 whose work stood out as being of a truly high order."\(^\text{51}\) Perhaps a key to Scott's success in 1861 is to be found in his good relationship with both Cameron and Curtin. Scott had become a close friend of Curtin through Pennsylvania Railroad and political affairs and during his term as Cameron's assistant developed a staunch friendship with Curtin's rival as well.\(^\text{52}\)

Among the most important duties of a governor during war time is the protection of his state from invasion. During Curtin's two terms as governor, Pennsylvania experienced no less than three rebel invasions and threats of two others. Curtin's activity in preparing for these invasions encompassed appeals to both the citizens of the state and the national government for troops, alerting Lincoln and the War Department of enemy movements and communications with officers in the field.

Pennsylvania's first invasion threat came in September 1862, after Lee's invasion of Maryland. The Confederates at Hagerstown seemed likely to move into Pennsylvania with Harrisburg as their objective. Curtin, alarmed by the threat, issued a proclamation for the formation of militia and appealed to Stanton through Scott and Col. John Wright to send General Reynolds to command the Pennsylvania forces, thinking that Pennsylvanians would rally around Reynolds, a fellow Pennsylvanian. After several days of deliberation, Stanton

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\(^\text{47}\) See p. 155.


\(^\text{49}\) Scott had already been involved in an investigation concerning his alleged corruption of Pennsylvania legislators in the tonnage tax legislation. See *WPHM*, XLVII, 339.

\(^\text{50}\) Kamm, 69-70; Fish, 792.

\(^\text{51}\) Kamm, 199.

\(^\text{52}\) Ibid., 81.
ordered Reynolds to Harrisburg. On September 11, Lincoln met with his Cabinet and military advisers to consider Curtin’s request for 80,000 men to defend the state. General Halleck and Secretary Chase did not believe the situation in Pennsylvania warranted sending such a large force; Lincoln and Stanton were concerned about the supply of arms for the number of men requested. In answering Curtin’s plea, Lincoln explained that they could not afford to concentrate so great a number in one place, and that Pennsylvania would be better served by attacking the enemy from the rear. Curtin replied that he was satisfied with Lincoln’s reasons for refusing to send the troops and set about strengthening the state militia. During the next few days, Lincoln and Curtin telegraphed frequently for news of General McClellan’s progress in forcing the Confederates back from Hagerstown.

McClellan did succeed in preventing the rebels from entering Pennsylvania in September 1862, but the Confederates raided the town of Chambersburg in the middle of October of the same year. On October 11, a detachment of 1,500 of J.E.B. Stuart’s cavalry entered Chambersburg, chiefly for the purpose of obtaining horses and supplies. The townsmen surrendered peaceably, but the raiders stayed through the night. Alexander McClure relates the story of how he entertained a group of the rebel officers who had been sent to take him prisoner. The rebels accepted McClure’s hospitality before learning his identity, and, according to McClure, were then too gallant to arrest their host.

Curtin’s activity during Stuart’s Raid seems to have involved notifying the War Department and calling out troops to defend Gettysburg and Carlisle to prevent the raiders from entering Harrisburg. In the spring of 1863, Curtin again feared that Lee would press into Pennsylvania. Near the end of April, the Governor telegraphed to Stanton a report of rebel movements in West Virginia and related the fears of the residents of the Pittsburgh area. Lincoln replied, assuring Curtin that an attack in Pennsylvania was unlikely. Curtin

55 Miers, III, 140; Basler, V, 415, 427.
seemed to be satisfied by Lincoln's assurance and forwarded the President's telegram to Western Pennsylvania. In June 1863, Curtin again was alerted to a possible invasion of Pennsylvania. Before calling for volunteers, he desired the backing of the federal government. Curtin sent Thomas A. Scott to Washington with a plan by which Lincoln would call on the Governor for 50,000 soldiers. Scott found the plan to be illegal, however, and was obliged to find an alternative, by which Lincoln called for 100,000 men from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland, Pennsylvania's share being 50,000. The next day, 15 June, Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, who was by no means an admirer of Curtin, wrote in his diary:

I have a panic telegraph from Governor Curtin, who is [always] excitable and easily alarmed, entreating that guns and gunners be sent from the navy yard at Philadelphia to Harrisburg without delay . . . [Stanton] Ridiculed Curtin's fears. Thought it would be well, however, to send such guns and men as could be spared to allay his apprehension.

Curtin may have been correct in fearing for the security of his capital. In a letter of 11 June 1863, to his father, Congressman John Covode, young George Covode wrote:

Stewarts [sic] adjt. Genl was captured & had on his person plans for a raid to Harrisburg & would no doubt have been successfull [sic] had we not gone over and fought them.

Curtin called for 50,000 men to defend the state capital, but Pennsylvania's greatest invasion of the War was still two weeks away.

In the accounts of Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania, June 27-July 4, there seems to be little mention of Curtin's activity, beyond the usual calling for troops and waiting for telegrams from the front. McClure relates that Curtin was ill at the time of the invasion and was ordered home to bed. Perhaps this is an explanation for his seeming inactivity.

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59 Basler, VI, 189, 193, 195. *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 29 Apr. 1863, 2; 2 May 1863, 2.
61 Welles writes disparagingly of Curtin on two other occasions. In August 1864, Welles writes "Governor Curtin and all Harrisburg are doubtless in a ferment. Was told the bells in Harrisburg were all ringing (an alarm). I asked if it included the dinnerbell of Governor Curtin, for he would be frantic to stir up the people, and never disbelieved the largest fib that was sent abroad." II, 89. In 1867 Welles characterized Curtin as "limber, deceptive, and unreliable." III, 16.
63 McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, II, 103. In a letter to the author, Curtin Winsor, whose grandfather, William Curtin, was Andrew Curtin's son, relates a story about his grandfather during the Battle of Gettysburg:
At the time of the invasion, McClure stood by the telegraph office and also rushed to Philadelphia to raise troops. If Curtin did not, in fact, take an active part in preparing the state for the Gettysburg campaign, he is at least to be commended for having enlisted the aid of a competent staff to assume his duties during the emergency.

The last important rebel raid into Pennsylvania resulted in the burning of Chambersburg by McCausland's raiders on 30 July 1864. McClure states that the raid would have been prevented had Curtin's troops remained under his control instead of being mustered into U.S. service. According to McClure, Curtin had a number of regiments of state militia, which would have been adequate for the defense of Chambersburg but were sent instead to reinforce Hunter and the Army of the Potomac. Again, Curtin's efforts to protect his state had been thwarted by the War Department.

Among Andrew Curtin's most admirable qualities was that of compassion. Many of his most lasting contributions to Pennsylvania were due to his humanitarian efforts. Curtin insisted that all letters from soldiers be answered, either by himself or by his personal secretary. On many occasions, the Governor visited camp hospitals to talk with the wounded or to present them with some recognition of their sacrifices. In addition, Curtin heard countless pleas from wounded soldiers and their families and took what steps he could to relieve their anxieties.

The purpose of the military state agency established in Washington by Curtin was to minister to the needs of Pennsylvanians in the service. Matthew S. Quay, as military state agent, was one of Curtin's most effective liaisons with both the national administration and the

"At the age of 14 my grandfather, William Wilson Curtin, eldest son of the Governor, ran away from the gubernatorial mansion in Harrisburg in June of 1863 when the Confederate troops were approaching Gettysburg. At first he was believed to have been kidnapped but state detectives found him digging trenches outside of Harrisburg for the defense of the Capitol against the suspected Confederate attack. He was very tall for his age and had succeeded in convincing the authorities that he was seventeen and therefore accepted for military service. Upon being returned to the gubernatorial mansion he was imprisoned in a bathroom on the second floor and vented his feelings by throwing toilet articles, including paper, out of the window while the Governor was holding some sort of a reception to celebrate the Battle of Gettysburg."

64 Russell, 290; Beale, I, 350.
66 Hesseltine, Lincoln and the War Governors, 344; McClure, Life and Services of Andrew G. Curtin, 17, 29.
soldiers. During his stay in Washington, Quay was given full power to order the muster of Curtin's officers, handle requests from soldiers, and appeal to Lincoln concerning Pennsylvania's sick and wounded soldiers.

Curtin's concern for the soldiers of his state was extended to their families. Through his efforts, the Pennsylvania legislature appropriated a $50,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Railroad (a token payment of tonnage duties) for the establishment and maintenance of homes and schools for soldiers' orphans. The orphanage, known as the Scotland School, grew into the present day state orphanage.

Andrew Curtin established the practice of bringing Pennsylvania war dead home for burial. His respect for the memory of the Pennsylvania soldiers who died in battle was further demonstrated by his initiative in creating the Gettysburg National Cemetery, dedicated 19 November 1863. The seventeen-acre memorial ground, purchased for about $2,500, remains a tribute not only to those who died in the War, but also to those who realized the meaning of their sacrifices.

67 Dr. James A. Kehl, Assistant Dean of Social Sciences, University of Pittsburgh, personal interview with the author at University of Pittsburgh, 26 February 1963.

68 Basler, VII, 444; Andrew G. Curtin, telegrams, 6 Jan., 9 Jan., 28 Feb. 1863, to Matthew S. Quay. Quay mss in office of Dr. Kehl.

69 Pennsylvania Archives, Series IV, VIII (Papers of the Governors, 1858-71), 521; Hesseltine, loc. cit.; McClure, loc. cit.

Chapter V

In Pursuit of the "Curtin Phantom" 1

It is not uncommon for a public servant to distinguish himself during wartime. Although leadership in time of war is probably lauded most frequently in the case of Presidents and military leaders, there have been instances of outstanding contributions among lesser ranking public officials.

The purpose of this study has been to examine the career of a Civil War governor, Andrew Gregg Curtin of Pennsylvania. Admittedly, the author has been interested in bringing to light new biographical data about Curtin, but another important basis for investigation has been the search for greater understanding of the role of a governor

1 "The Curtin Phantom" is a phrase coined by Dr. James A. Kehl of the University of Pittsburgh in an interview with the author, 26 February 1963.
Above: Andrew Gregg Curtin's boyhood home, Curtin, Pennsylvania
Below: Memorial to Andrew Gregg Curtin, Bellefonte, Pennsylvania
in time of war. In generalizing about the role of a wartime governor, however, it is necessary to recognize the uniqueness of the Civil War in American History. Unlike other wars in which the United States has been involved, the conflict of 1861-1865 was not fought against a foreign power; it was a War Between the States, and as such it created problems of administration and defense uncommon to those of other wars.

In general, the loyal governors were responsible to the national government in the enlisting of soldiers and commissioning of field, company and staff officers. Depending on his convictions about the prosecution of the War, a governor could bring pressure to bear in such matters as emancipation and the choice of commanding officers. Such interference was by no means required of the governors by the national government, however, and it served chiefly as an indication of the personal conviction of a governor or the sentiment of his state.

The responsibilities of a governor to his state were greatly magnified during the Civil War. The governors had to deal with both state and national legislators, frequently on matters of military consequence. In addition to routine legislation, the governors had a hand in introducing measures for developing and financing the war effort of the state. The role of a governor also demanded activity in behalf of the party which worked for his election, in both national and state elections.

Another of the duties of a wartime governor was to take measures for the defense of his state. Not only was the governor responsible for the raising of troops for the national army; he also was obliged to defend his state against invasion by organizing a state militia. Such a responsibility required the services of a large administrative staff to direct the raising, quartering, feeding, arming and training of state troops. It was the responsibility of a governor to appoint this staff, as well as to award military contracts.

In using the career of Andrew Curtin as a case study of a governor's role in wartime, the author has found that Curtin's position was atypical in several respects. In the first place, Pennsylvania was more vulnerable to Confederate invasion because of the desirability of knocking out supply lines from her great industrial centers, and because of her proximity to Southern territory. A Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania was more likely than a movement into Massachusetts or Maine, for example.

Secondly, Pennsylvania’s war effort was colored by a bitter feud between two factions of the Republican Party in Pennsylvania, those of Andrew Curtin and Simon Cameron, which influenced the relations of the Governor with the War Department during the first months of the War.

Finally, Andrew Curtin’s attitude toward the War and toward the Lincoln administration marked him as a “moderate” among the War governors. Although there were occasions on which Curtin joined the other governors in efforts to urge Lincoln to take a more vigorous approach to the War, Curtin, for the most part, demonstrated a willingness to back Lincoln in the face of criticism by more radical governors.

Andrew Curtin’s career as Civil War Governor was marked by two notable circumstances. First, political considerations appear to have influenced Curtin’s decisions to a marked degree. This is particularly true in military matters. Not only was the Pennsylvania draft postponed until after the fall elections and draft statistics juggled to win doubtful districts; soldiers and government clerks were sent home to Pennsylvania in order that they might cast their votes for Curtin’s party.3 Another instance of Curtin’s political approach to military matters was in the question of providing uniforms in 1863. In June of that year, Curtin wrote to Lincoln to request that Generals Darius Couch and William T. H. Brooks be authorized to provide uniforms for the ninety-days’ men, rather than calling on the balky Pennsylvania Legislature for authority. Curtin, speaking of assembling the Legislature, wrote: “This should be avoided for reasons which you can appreciate . . . .”4 Even Curtin’s arch-foe, Simon Cameron, wanted to avoid summoning the Pennsylvania Legislature for uniforms, and wrote to Lincoln: “Knowing the situation of matters here and the temper of our people, that call should not be made a necessity to the State Government.”5

The second unusual circumstance was the antagonism between Curtin and Cameron. Simon Cameron’s seeming agreement with him in the above passage is contrary to the usual tone of his relations with Andrew Curtin. In fact, the entire Civil War period in Pennsylvania politics is dominated by the Cameron-Curtin feud.6 Not only did the

3 See fn. 88 on page 37 of WPHM, XLVIII, Jan., 1965.
5 Ibid., 364.
6 The Pittsburgh Post, 8 Oct. 1894, 1; J. G. Randall, Lincoln, the President (New York, 1945-1955), III, 277.
antagonism affect recruiting and equipping troops. It also placed President Lincoln in an uncomfortable position between Cameron, his Secretary of War in 1861, and Curtin, the governor of one of the most important of the Northern states. Early in 1861, Lincoln tried to assure Curtin that he did not have an unfavorable opinion of him, nor had he taken sides in a quarrel among "friends who disagree with each other." In the course of the Civil War, Lincoln was to learn that the Cameron-Curtin battle was more than a quarrel among "friends who disagree with each other." The antagonism, begun well before the War, influenced both state and national politics until Curtin's death in 1894.

In evaluating Andrew Curtin's career as Civil War Governor of Pennsylvania, the author has concluded that in many instances Curtin was advised, if not directed, by Alexander McClure and McClure's close friend, Eli Slifer. McClure's determination to enter the Curtin camp was no less wholehearted than his friendship with Slifer. As early as 1852, McClure wrote to Slifer:

It looks very much as if Curtin would run. He sent me some confidential messages by Gen Crawford a few days ago which looked very much that way. Indeed, I am satisfied that he at least does not discourage it positively. Well, if so I will follow his fortunes as of old, but the act of nomination must not be mine. Not only did McClure follow Curtin's fortunes; his friend Eli Slifer appears to have become involved in the same business. In 1858, Jacob B. Bomberger reported to Slifer that Curtin was anxious to be nominated for the Senate. Later that year, Bomberger wrote that he was "In a Kettle of fish about this governor-making." Another correspondent was reporting to Eli Slifer about Curtin's candidacy for governor in 1859. In a letter to Slifer, Joseph Casey asked Slifer to

9 The Slifer-Dill Papers, available on microfilm from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, contain numerous letters on political and personal matters from A. K. McClure to Eli Slifer in the 1850's. By 1859, McClure's friendship with Slifer reached the point where he was anxious to work for Slifer's re-election as State Treasurer: "I now care for but one thing — that is your re-election. In that command me in any way & to any extent." A. K. McClure, 13 Oct. 1859, letter to Eli Slifer. In the light of the McClure-Sifer friendship, it is reasonable to suppose that McClure was responsible for Curtin's appointment of Slifer as Commonwealth Secretary.
11 Jacob B. Bomberger, 2 Aug. 1858, letter to Eli Slifer. Ibid.
12 Jacob B. Bomberger, 14 Dec. 1858, letter to Eli Slifer. Ibid.
arrange a meeting for him with Curtin, as "There is another pretty delicate matter there to fin. up if he is to be our candidate." While the gubernatorial election year of 1860 drew closer, McClure and Slifer stepped up their activities in Curtin's behalf. McClure wrote to Slifer in April 1859 (illegible) that he wished to meet him in Harrisburg, and that "Perhaps it would be well to have Curtin there the same evening, as he will be on his way to Phila. about the same time, & he needs both counsel and encouragement." 

Nor did the influence of Slifer and McClure wane once Curtin was in office. McClure, who entered the State Senate in 1859, led the Curtin wing in fights on the Senate floor and acted as chairman of the Senate Military Committee. As State People's Party chairman, he conducted Curtin's political campaigns, using his newspaper, the Franklin Repository, to advance Curtin's interests. Later, as author of a number of books on the Civil War period, McClure stressed the great accomplishments of the Curtin administration, conveniently overlooking any weaknesses the Governor might have had.

That Curtin may have been the unknowing agent of the Lincoln administration's policy toward the governors is suggested by William B. Hesseltine and Hazel Wolf. In writing of the Altoona Conference, Hesseltine and Wolf imply that the apparent intention of Seward to go to New York to call a conference of mayors was a preconceived scheme to get Curtin to take the initiative in calling a conference of governors, and that rumors about a conference of mayors were intentionally spread to press Curtin to take the action the administration had wanted all along. This theory may have some basis, in that Curtin already had demonstrated his opposition to Seward in the 1860 Republican Convention and might have resented being requested outright by Seward to call such a conference. However, it seems just as likely that Curtin's belief in the need for a governors' conference would have been expressed without any prodding from Seward.

13 Joseph Casey, 29 Mar. 1859, letter to Eli Slifer. Ibid.
14 A. K. McClure, 14 Apr. 1859 (?), letter to Eli Slifer. Ibid.
15 McClure wrote to Curtin in 1862 or 1863: "Dear Gov. You will find an Editorial article in this weeks Repository written by me, on Pennsylvania and the War, which should be copied into the Telegraph. You can have someone suggest it to Bergner [editor of the Cameron-dominated Harrisburg Telegraph] or Forney [of the Philadelphia Press]. It is a brief review of the success of your administration in organizing and caring for our soldiers." A. K. McClure, 9 June 1862 (1863-illegible), letter to Andrew Curtin. Ibid.
Undoubtedly, Andrew Curtin's effectiveness as a War Governor was impaired by his weakened physical condition throughout his term as Governor. Although Eli Slifer's influence on Curtin before his election appears to have been considerable, his position as Secretary of the Commonwealth under Curtin made Slifer even more influential as Curtin's health deteriorated. The Constitution of 1839 required only routine clerical work on the part of the Commonwealth Secretary, but the office under Curtin corresponded roughly to that of lieutenant governor today. The Slifer papers indicate that during Curtin's several illnesses which took him from the capital, many of his duties were assumed by Secretary Slifer. Through Slifer came requests to Curtin for action in behalf of small politicians, businesses seeking special legislation, soldiers and soldiers' families. Curtin, in his absences from Harrisburg, relied on Slifer to speak for him.¹⁷

The nature of Andrew Curtin's illness can be inferred only from references to it in the polite language of the times. Curtin appears to have suffered from a stomach disorder which required surgery at some time in 1862.¹⁸ One example of the effect of Curtin's illness on his duties was his inability to stay at the capital during the Battle of Gettysburg, during which Curtin, because of his feeble condition, was forced home to take his bed and

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¹⁷ The extent of Slifer's influence upon Curtin and upon the record of the Curtin administration is indicated in three letters found in the Slifer papers. In one, from Andrew Gregg, Slifer is asked to use his influence in urging Curtin to give Gregg a political appointment. Gregg writes: "The Governor knows my situation and I think if he can do so would feel disposed to aid me . . . ." Andrew Gregg, 26 Nov. 1863, letter to Eli Slifer. Even A. K. McClure asked Slifer to use his influence in getting a political appointment for McClure's brother-in-law: "I have never asked political preferment for a relative in my life, and feel peculiarly delicate about urging it upon Curtin . . . if Curtin has no special preference or duty in the matter, a kind suggestion from you might be of advantage . . . ." A. K. McClure, 21 June 1862 (?), letter to Eli Slifer. Curtin himself relied on Slifer to speak for him concerning a military appointment opposed by John Forney: "[You] can explain and keep me harmless." Andrew Curtin, no date, letter to Eli Slifer. Slifer-Dill Papers.

¹⁸ It is known that Curtin was recuperating from surgery in New York in June 1862, when he met with Secretary Seward. Mrs. Curtin wrote to Slifer 28 (June ?) 1862: "Gov. Curtin is still very much prostrated from the effects of the last surgical operation . . . ." One of the letters written to Eli Slifer asks a letter of introduction for a man who wishes to contact the New York doctor who operated on Curtin for a fistula. On 9 August 1862, Curtin wrote from Bedford Springs that he was well enough to return to Harrisburg. Several other undated letters from Curtin to Slifer report on the health of the Governor. Mrs. Kate Curtin, 28 (June ?) 1862, telegram to Eli Slifer; George Funston Miller, no date, letter to Eli Slifer; Andrew Curtin, 9 Aug. 1862, telegram to Eli Slifer. Ibid.
remain there several days with the assurance that he would be notified of any new peril that arose.19

Curtin's health was a major consideration in the gubernatorial campaign of 1863. Having declined renomination because of his health, Curtin was persuaded to run despite his physical weakness, but was physically unable to make many campaign speeches. A large part of Curtin's second term was spent in recovering from illness. Soon after his inauguration, he sailed to Havana on a government vessel offered him, at Lincoln's insistence, by Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles.20 His health improved by March 1863, and he was able to return to Harrisburg that month. In December 1863, Curtin apparently became ill again. Wayne McVeagh, the Republican State Committee Chairman in 1863, wrote to Eli Slifer to inquire about the Governor's health:

How is the Governor? The newspapers speak in a manner which is alarming . . . . I have supposed it is the old trouble with bad neuralgic complications whose issue in his case must always be uncertain and cause great anxiety to his friends.21

Near the end of his term, Curtin appears to have suffered from arthritis and again went to Cuba to recuperate. He wrote to Slifer from Havana that he was still "... not free from disease . . . hands are stiff." A week later, Curtin wrote: "... my legs are obedient to my will and the pain in my spine which so distressed me is almost gone." 22 It seems reasonable to assume that the various illnesses of Governor Curtin reduced his effectiveness as a governor, and that they magnified the influence of such men as Eli Slifer and A. K. McClure upon his administration.

In evaluating Andrew Curtin's reputation as an outstanding War Governor, the author has attempted to discover what features of his personality led Curtin to act as he did. In so doing, account has been taken of the attitudes of Curtin's contemporaries, as well as those of more recent historians having access to manuscript collections and government records.

It appears that Andrew Curtin was criticized by his contemporaries for the very preparedness which makes him an outstanding governor in the opinion of more recent historians. Of Curtin's con-

temporaries, the least favorably inclined were those who criticized his anxiety in the face of invasion threats. Gideon Welles, Lincoln’s Secretary of the Navy, was particularly critical of Curtin’s fears, as was the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton. Welles wrote of meeting with Stanton, who “Ridiculed Curtin’s fears.” 23 Hugh Harrold, a Philadelphia banker, wrote to James Bell, blaming Curtin’s alarm for causing financial reverses in Philadelphia. Speaking of Curtin and Philadelphia’s Mayor Henry, Harrold wrote: “These two gentlemen, have I think weak nerves. I am inclined to think that the sky is not to fall on us for some time yet.” 24

Andrew Curtin was aware of the criticism of his fear for Pennsylvania’s safety, and in a letter to Lincoln he tried to answer the charges: “Do not suppose for one instant that I am unnecessarily alarmed. I believe I know all that I have stated to be true.” 25

More recent evaluations of Curtin as a War Governor count his military preparedness as one of his outstanding accomplishments. A. Howard Meneely, author of War Department, 1861, ranks him with Governors Andrew, Morgan, and Morton as the most earnest and vigorous of the governors. In speaking of the war effort in 1861, Meneely says, “Perhaps the most far-sighted and stimulating action of all was in Cameron’s home state of Pennsylvania.” 26

Bernard Levin, who has written about Pennsylvania’s role in the Civil War, compares Curtin with Cameron and concludes that, “Andrew Curtin appears to have been a higher type of public servant,” and says that Curtin had a greater sense of responsibility than did Cameron. 27

Civil War historian Allan Nevins also regards Curtin as a very good War Governor. 28 Commending Curtin’s preparedness in the early months of the War, he declares: “Fortunate it was that Curtin had taken a few simple steps . . . Fortunate it was also that Virginia did not possess a governor as impetuously earnest as Curtin . . . .” 29

26 Meneely, 141, 143.
27 Levin, 6.
28 Allan Nevins, Huntington Library, personal interview with the author at Chatham College, Pittsburgh, 7 May 1962.
In William B. Hesseltine's *Lincoln and the War Governors*, Andrew Curtin suffers by comparison with Abraham Lincoln. While Hesseltine regards Lincoln as a man of calm balance and superior intellect, he speaks of Curtin as "orotund and confused." 30 Elsewhere in the book, however, Hesseltine portrays Curtin as a man of fine appearance, gifted in rhetoric and wit, charming, dignified, and "right on most of the things that counted." 31

From the material available to the author, it appears that Andrew Curtin was a determined and loyal governor, anxious to defend Pennsylvania and the Union from radical influences from within the Union, as well as rebel invasions from without. If Curtin appears to have meddled in affairs of which he had little knowledge, the author feels that his errors of judgment were due to the gravity with which he approached his official duties. Although no conclusive evidence of corruption has been found on the part of Curtin himself, he and his political friends were not unaware of the desirability of manipulating situations to their advantage. The problem of determining the degree of such maneuvering, and of discovering whether Curtin himself had any part in it, remains unsolved. In the author's opinion, such an investigation of the real nature of Andrew Curtin's career depends upon further research in several areas.

Among the most elusive aspects of Curtin's career is that of his personal relationships with Alexander McClure and Simon Cameron. It is obvious from McClure's writings that he was intimately associated with Curtin and that he assumed an important position as one of the Governor's chief advisers. How this association came about, and why it assumed such overwhelming importance, remain to be discovered. It may be that Curtin and McClure saw in each other talents which each could use to his own disadvantage. Or there may have been some reason for one's indebtedness to the other which has yet to be disclosed. In any case, the Curtin-McClure relationship has been responsible for distorting most of the analyses of Pennsylvania Civil War history, due to the fact that a majority of historians are obliged to turn to McClure's works as the only large-scale, contemporary accounts of the period.

The Cameron-Curtin feud is another strange phenomenon of Curtin's career. Although most historians, including McClure, attribute the bitterness to the Senate fight of 1855, it is difficult to believe

30 Hesseltine, 391.
31 Ibid., 32.
that rivalry alone could have engendered the extreme bitterness which marked Cameron-Curtin relations for nearly half a century. A clue to the Cameron-Curtin bitterness may have been discovered in a letter written from James W. Brisbin of Bellefonte to Cameron's political ally, John Covode. Brisbin, offering his services in securing the gubernatorial nomination of Covode over Curtin, suggested producing proof to the nominating convention that Curtin had betrayed Cameron:

Or did you ever see a contract made between him and Cameron in which he agrees that if Cameron would use his influence to have him (Curtin) appointed Secretary of State under Pollock, he would in turn use his influence to have Cameron elected U S Senator [sic] You know how well he kept his contract — how he basely betrayed Cameron and fought him with the knife to the hilt. Mr. Kelley and the Editor of the Bulletin [sic] in Philad [sic] are the witnesses to the agreement and it is signed in Curtin's hand writing.12

If the above accusations could, in some way, be tested, the entire matter of the Cameron-Curtin rivalry, in the War Department as well as in Pennsylvania politics, could be explained more fully.

Clearly, the story of Andrew Curtin will be incomplete until his personal correspondence, if it exists at all, is discovered. The efforts of the author, as well as those of noted historians, have failed to produce any Curtin manuscripts.13 Failing to locate a body of Curtin papers, the author sees a need for undertaking the task of locating Curtin letters in other manuscript collections. Such a project would be time consuming and costly, but in the absence of Curtin manuscripts, it may be the only way of recreating a true picture of his career. In addition, there are untapped resources in government documents, telegraphic messages located in the Pennsylvania State Archives, and scores of Civil War newspapers. The limitations of time have prevented an exhaustive search of these sources, but the possibility of constructing such a picture of Andrew Gregg Curtin remains an interesting and challenging idea.

32 The Covode papers in the archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania contain a number of letters which illustrate the extent of the Cameron-Curtin bitterness.
33 There is reason to believe that the Curtin mss were burned soon after his death in 1894.