the rebels had to entrench instead of continuing the attack. Nevertheless, they kept the bluecoats off the railroad.

In three battles during the past eight days Hood’s 15,000 casualties were two and one-half times Sherman’s 6,000. But southern valor did seem to have stopped the inexorable Yankee advance on Atlanta. Union infantry and artillery settled down for a siege, while Sherman sent his cavalry on raids to wreck the railroad far south of the city. One division of northern horsemen headed for Andersonville to liberate Union captives at the notorious prison, but rebel cavalry headed them off halfway. Six hundred of these Yankee troopers did reach Andersonville—as prisoners. Confederate cavalry and militia prevented other Union detachments from doing more than minimal damage to the railroad, while southern raids in turn on Sherman’s supply line fared little better.

Civilians continued to flee the city; some of those who remained were killed by northern shells that rained down on their streets. “War is war, and not popularity-seeking,” wrote Sherman in pursuance of his career as Georgia’s most unpopular visitor.8 The defiant courage of Atlantans who stayed raised the spirits of southerners everywhere. Much of the Confederate press viewed Hood’s attacks as victories. The Atlanta Intelligence (published in Macon) predicted that “Sherman will suffer the greatest defeat that any Yankee General has suffered during the war. . . . The Yankee forces will disappear before Atlanta before the end of August.” The “cheering” news from Georgia convinced a War Department clerk in Richmond that “Sherman’s army is doomed.”9 Richmond newspapers exulted that “Atlanta is now felt to be safe, and Georgia will soon be free from the foe. . . . Everything seems to have changed in that State from the deepest despondency.”10

Opinion north of the Potomac reflected the other side of this coin of southern euphoria. As Sherman closed in on Atlanta during July, northern newspapers had daily predicted the city’s capture before the next edition. By early August the forecast had moderated to “a question of a few days,” and one reporter confessed himself “somewhat puzzled at the

8. Memoirs of Sherman, II, 111. It should be noted that factories, rail facilities, warehouses, and other military targets—including artillery emplacements—were scattered among residential areas of Atlanta.
10. Quoted in Hoehling, Last Train from Atlanta, 167, 251.
stubborn front presented by the enemy.” By the middle of the month a Boston newspaper expressed “much apprehension” while the New York Times warned against “these terrible fits of despondency, into which we plunge after each of our reverses and disappointments.” A Wisconsin soldier, formerly confident, wrote home on August 11 that “we make but little progress toward Atlanta, and it may be some time before we take the place.” In New York a prominent member of the Sanitary Commission feared that “both Grant and Sherman are on the eve of disaster.”

II

Indeed, Grant’s siege of Petersburg seemed even less successful during those dog days of summer than Sherman’s operations against Atlanta. Soldiers on both sides burrowed ever deeper in the trenches at Petersburg to escape the daily toll exacted by sharpshooters and mortars. Grant did not cease his efforts to interdict Lee’s supply lines and break through the defenses. During the latter half of June the rebels turned back an infantry drive and a cavalry raid that tried to cut Richmond’s remaining three railroads, though the Yankees managed to break all three temporarily. In these actions many of the exhausted veterans and inexperienced new troops in the Army of the Potomac performed poorly. The vaunted 2nd Corps, bled to a shadow of its former self, made an especially bad showing. And soon afterward Grant had to send away his best remaining unit, the 6th Corps.

This happened because Jubal Early’s 15,000 rebels, after driving David Hunter away from Lynchburg in June, had marched down the Shenandoah Valley and crossed the Potomac on July 6. They bowled over a scratch force of Federals at the Monocacy River east of Frederick on July 9 and marched unopposed toward Washington. This seemed a stunning reversal of the fortunes of war. Northern hopes of capturing Richmond were suddenly replaced by fears for the safety of their own capital. The rebels appeared in front of the Washington defenses five miles north of the White House on July 11. Except for convalescents, militia, and a few odds and ends of army units there were no troops to man them, for Grant had pulled the garrison out for service in Virginia. But the fortifications ringing the capital were immensely strong, and Grant, in re-

11. Northern newspapers quoted in ibid., 92, 99, 107, 126, 221, 278, 330; Wisconsin soldier quoted in ibid., 290; Strong, Diary, 474.
sponse to frantic appeals from the War Department, quickly sent the 6th Corps to Washington. These hardened veterans filed into the works just in time to discourage Early from assaulting them.

During the skirmishing on July 12 a distinguished visitor complete with stovepipe hat appeared at Fort Stevens to witness for the first time the sort of combat into which he had sent a million men over the past three years. Despite warnings, President Lincoln repeatedly stood to peer over the parapet as sharpshooters’ bullets whizzed nearby. Out of the corner of his eye a 6th Corps captain—Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.—noticed this ungainly civilian popping up. Without recognizing him, Holmes shouted “get down, you damn fool, before you get shot!” Amused by this irreverent command, Lincoln got down and stayed down. With the 6th Corps in his front and other Union troops gathering in his rear, Early wisely decided that it was time to return to Virginia. He did so with only a few scratches, much to Grant’s and Lincoln’s disgust, because the forces chasing him were divided among four command jurisdictions that could never quite coordinate their efforts.

During their raid some of Early’s soldiers made as little distinction between military and private property as did many northern soldiers in the South. Indeed, they went the Union invaders one better, for while the latter often seized or burned whatever tangible goods they could find they rarely took Confederate money, which was almost worthless. But northern greenbacks were another matter; the rebels levied $20,000 on Hagerstown and $200,000 on Frederick, besides drinking up the contents of Francis Preston Blair’s wine cellar, burning down the Silver Spring home of his son Montgomery the postmaster-general, and putting the torch to the private residence of Maryland’s governor. To add further injury to insult, on July 30 two of Early’s cavalry brigades rode into Pennsylvania, demanded $500,000 from the citizens of Chambersburg as restitution for Hunter’s pillaging in Virginia, and burned the town when they refused to pay.

Early’s foray to the outskirts of Washington caused the London Times to comment that “the Confederacy is more formidable than ever.” Many discouraged Yankees agreed. Gold soared to 285. “I see no bright spot anywhere,” wrote New York diarist George Templeton Strong, only “humiliation and disaster. . . . The blood and treasure spent on this

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summer's campaign have done little for the country." On July 18, Lincoln issued a new call for 500,000 men, with quota deficiencies to be filled by a draft just before the fall elections. "Lincoln is deader than dead," chortled a Democratic editor. Angered by the inability of fragmented Union forces to run Early down, Grant cut through the Washington red tape and put Phil Sheridan in charge of a newly created Army of the Shenandoah consisting of the 6th Corps, several brigades from David Hunter's former Army of West Virginia, two divisions recently transferred from Louisiana, and two divisions of Sheridan's own cavalry. Grant ordered Sheridan to go after Early "and follow him to the death." Sheridan was just the man for the job, but it would take him time to organize this composite army. Meanwhile Grant suffered another frustration in his attempt to break Lee's lines at Petersburg.

This was the famous battle of the Crater. In conception it bid fair to become the most brilliant stroke of the war; in execution it became a tragic fiasco. A section in the center of the Union line at Petersburg held by Burnside's 9th Corps lay within 150 yards of an enemy salient on high ground where the rebels had built a strong redoubt. One day in June, Colonel Henry Pleasants of the 48th Pennsylvania, a Schuylkill County regiment containing many coal miners, overheard one of his men growl: "We could blow that damn fort out of existence if we could run a mine shaft under it." A prewar mining engineer, Pleasants liked the idea, proposed it to his division commisar, who submitted it to Burnside, who approved it. Pleasants put his regiment to work excavating a tunnel more than 500 feet long. They did so with no help from the army's engineers, who scoffed at the project as "claptrap and nonsense" because ventilation problems had limited all previous military tunnels in history to less than 400 feet. Meade consequently put no faith in the enterprise. Nevertheless, the 48th Pennsylvania improvised its own tools and found its own lumber to timber the shaft. Burnside borrowed an old-fashioned theodolite from a civilian so Pleasants could triangulate for distance and direction. Pleasants also rigged a coal-

13. Times quoted in Foote, Civil War, III, 461; Strong, Diary, 467, 474.
mining ventilation shaft with a fire at the base to create a draft and pull in fresh air through a tube. In this manner the colonel confounded the skeptics. His men dug a shaft 511 feet long with lateral galleries at the end each nearly forty feet long under the Confederate line in which they placed four tons of gunpowder. Reluctantly converted, Meade and Grant authorized Burnside to spring the mine and attack with his corps through the resulting gap.

The sidewhiskered general’s enthusiasm for the project had grown steadily from the time it began on June 25. Here was a chance to redeem his failure at Fredericksburg by capturing Petersburg and winning the war. Burnside’s corps contained four divisions. Three had been worn down by combat since the Wilderness; the fourth was fresh, having seen no action except guarding rear-area supply lines. It was a black division, and few officers in the Army of the Potomac from Meade down yet believed in the fighting capacity of black troops. Burnside was an exception, so he designated this fresh division to lead the assault. The black soldiers received special tactical training for this task. Their morale was high; they were eager “to show the white troops what the colored division could do,” said one of their officers.\(^\text{17}\) Grant arranged a diversion by Hancock’s corps north of the James which pulled several of Lee’s divisions away from the Petersburg front. Everything seemed set for success when the mine was scheduled to explode at dawn on July 30.

Only hours before this happened, however, Meade—with Grant’s approval—ordered Burnside to send in his white divisions first. Meade’s motive seems to have been lack of confidence in the inexperienced black troops, though in later testimony before the Committee on the Conduct of the War Grant mentioned another reason as well: If things went wrong, “it would then be said . . . that we were shoving these people ahead to get killed because we did not care anything about them. But that could not be said if we put white troops in front.”\(^\text{18}\)

Apparently demoralized by the last-minute change of his battle plan, Burnside lost all control over the operation. The commander of the division designated to lead the assault (chosen by drawing straws!), James H. Ledlie, had a mediocre record and an alcohol problem. During the assault he stayed behind in the trenches drinking rum cadged from the surgeon. With no preparation and without leadership, his men attacked

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\(^{18}\) Powell, “The Battle of the Petersburg Crater,” \textit{ibid.}, 548.
in disordered fashion. The explosion blew a hole 170 feet long, 60 feet wide, and 30 feet deep. One entire rebel regiment and an artillery battery were buried in the debris. Confederate troops for a couple of hundred yards on either side of the crater fled in terror. When Ledlie's division went forward, its men stopped to gawk at the awesome spectacle. Mesmerized by this vision of what they supposed Hell must be like, many of them went into the crater instead of fanning out left and right to roll up the torn enemy flanks. The two following white divisions did little better, degenerating into a disorganized mob as rebel artillery and mortars found the range and began shooting at the packed bluecoats in the crater as at fish in a barrel. Frantic officers, with no help from Burnside or from division commanders, managed to form fragments of brigades for a further penetration. But by mid-morning a southern division commanded by William Mahone was ready for a counterattack. The black troops who had finally pushed their way through the milling or retreating white Yankees caught the brunt of Mahone's assault. As on other fields, rebel soldiers enraged by the sight of black men in uniform murdered several of them who tried to surrender. When it was all over, the 9th Corps had nothing to show for its big bang except 4,000 casualties (against fewer than half as many for the enemy), a huge hole in the ground, bitter mutual recriminations, and new generals commanding the corps and one of its divisions. Grant pronounced the epitaph in a message to Halleck: "It was the saddest affair I have witnessed in the war. Such opportunity for carrying fortifications I have never seen and do not expect again to have." 19

III

The months of July and August 1864 brought a greater crisis of northern morale than the same months in 1862. The theme of homefront war songs (which enjoyed an extraordinary popularity during the conflict, with sheet music selling millions of copies) took a sudden turn from ebullient patriotism to a longing for peace. When This Cruel War Is Over, with its haunting refrain "Weeping, sad and lonely" became the best-seller of 1864, while the chorus of Tenting on the Old Camp Ground seemed more than ever to echo northern sentiment: "Many are the hearts that are weary tonight, Wishing for the war to cease." From the presses poured new songs whose titles hardly encouraged martial enthusiasm:

Bear This Gently to My Mother; Yes, I Would the War Were Over; Brother, Will You Come Back? Tell Me, Is My Father Coming Back?

Even the spectacular achievement of David Farragut’s fleet in Mobile Bay did little at first to dispel northern depression. As the fog lifted on the morning of August 5, Farragut took his fourteen wooden ships and four Monitors past the largest of the three forts guarding the entrance to Mobile Bay. During a terrific duel between fort and fleet, Farragut climbed the mainmast to see what was going on above the smoke from the guns of his flagship U.S.S. Hartford. A quartermaster lashed the admiral to the mast and thereby created an unforgettable image in the rich traditions of the U.S. Navy. Farragut soon added a memorable phrase as well. The rebels had scattered mines across the channel. One of them blew up the leading Monitor and sent her to the bottom with more than ninety of her crew. This halted the whole fleet under the punishing guns of the fort. Refusing to countenance retreat, Farragut shouted “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead.” He took his flagship through the minefield safely, followed by the rest of the fleet. When they reached the bay they pounded into submission a rebel flotilla led by the giant ironclad C.S.S. Tennessee, the most redoubtable but also one of the most unwieldly ships afloat. During the next three weeks, combined operations by the navy and one army division captured the three forts. Though the city of Mobile thirty miles to the north at the head of the bay remained in Confederate hands, this last blockade-running port in the Gulf east of Texas was out of business.

The dimensions of Farragut’s victory were more apparent to the North in retrospect than in August, when so much dismal attention was focused on the apparent lack of progress in Virginia and Georgia. Defeatism and a desire for peace spread from the copperheads like widening rings from a stone thrown in the water. “Stop the War!” declared editorials in Democratic newspapers. “If nothing else would impress upon the people the absolute necessity of stopping this war, its utter failure to accomplish any results would be sufficient.” By the beginning of August the veteran Republican leader Thurlow Weed was convinced that “Lincoln’s reelection [is] an impossibility. . . . The people are wild for peace.”

Clement L. Vallandigham had returned from his Canadian exile in

June to attend an Ohio Democratic convention which denounced this "unnecessary war" and adopted resolutions calling for an "immediate cessation of hostilities" to negotiate "a just and lasting peace." Not wishing to revive Vallandigham's martyrdom, Lincoln decided to leave him alone. Aware that the Ohio copperhead had been elected "Grand Commander" of a shadowy organization known as the Sons of Liberty—which Republican propaganda pumped up to a vast pro-Confederate conspiracy—the administration probably hoped that if given enough rope he would hang himself. Instead, Vallandigham's return seemed to kindle a forest fire of peace resolutions in Democratic district conventions throughout the North. It appeared that the peace faction would control the party's national convention beginning in Chicago on August 29.  

Believing that all was lost, the mercurial Horace Greeley wrote to the president in July. "Our bleeding, bankrupt, almost dying country," he declared, "longs for peace—shudders at the prospect of fresh conscriptions, of further wholesale devastations, and of new rivers of human blood." Greeley had learned that two Confederate envoys were at Niagara Falls, Canada, supposedly bearing peace proposals from Jefferson Davis. "I entreat you," Greeley wrote Lincoln, "to submit overtures for pacification to the Southern insurgents." The president responded immediately, authorizing Greeley to bring to Washington under safe conduct "any person anywhere professing to have any proposition of Jefferson Davis in writing, for peace, embracing the restoration of the Union and abandonment of slavery."  

Lincoln knew perfectly well that Davis had not authorized negotiations on such conditions. He also knew that the rebel agents had come to Canada not to negotiate peace but to stir up antiwar opposition in the North. Union detectives had infiltrated copperhead groups that were in contact with these agents in Canada. The detectives had uncovered a series of bizarre plots linked to the Richmond government. Confederate leaders shared with Republicans the conviction that a potent fifth column of southern sympathizers in the Midwest stood poised for an uprising to take their states out of the Union and establish a separate peace with the Confederacy. That this "Northwest Conspiracy" existed only in the dreams of fringe elements among the Peace Democrats did

22. Greeley to Lincoln, July 7, 1864, Lincoln to Greeley, July 9, 1864, CWL, VII, 435·
not prevent it from becoming a crucial factor in the calculations of both governments in 1864.

To the War and State departments in Richmond came reports from Confederate spies of "a perfect organisation . . . of formidable character" in the lower Midwest variously known as the Knights of the Golden Circle, the Order of American Knights, or the Sons of Liberty and containing half a million members "for the purpose of revolution and the expulsion or death of the abolitionists and free negroes." 23 Perhaps the most influential such report came from Captain Thomas C. Hines, a Kentuckian and a scout with John Hunt Morgan's cavalry division which had done so much damage behind Union lines in Kentucky during 1862–63. In July 1863 Morgan had led a raid across the Ohio River into the North. After a long chase through southern Indiana and Ohio, Union cavalry had finally captured Morgan and most of his men, including Hines. Imprisoned in the Ohio penitentiary, Morgan and Hines along with several other officers made a spectacular tunnel escape in November 1863. They returned to the Confederacy after thrilling adventures of derring-do. These credentials helped Hines persuade southern leaders of the potential for Canadian-based sabotage operations against the North. In a secret session on February 15, 1864, the Confederate Congress appropriated $5 million for this purpose. Jefferson Davis dispatched Hines to Canada with instructions to take charge of other escaped rebel prisoners there and to carry out "appropriate enterprises of war against our enemies." On his way through the North, Hines was to "confer with the leading persons friendly or attached to the cause of the Confederacy, or who may be advocates of peace, and do all in your power to induce our friends to organize and prepare themselves to render such aid as circumstances may allow." 24

The Confederate government also sent a number of civilian agents by blockade-runner to Canada. Leaders of this group were Jacob Thompson, a former U.S. secretary of the interior in the Buchanan administration, and Clement C. Clay, former U.S. senator from Alabama. Both men had many friends among northern Democrats. During


the summer of 1864 these rebel agents conferred with dozens of Peace Democrats (including Vallandigham before he returned to the United States) at various cities in Canada, especially St. Catherines near Niagara Falls. They plotted a fantastic variety of activities ranging from Confederate subsidies of Democratic newspapers and of peace candidates for state offices to the capture of a Union gunboat on Lake Erie and the liberation of Confederate prisoners at Johnson’s Island on that lake and at Camp Douglas near Chicago. Some of these operations actually occurred. Thompson channelled funds to newspapers, to organizers of peace rallies, and to the Democratic candidate for governor in Illinois. Rebel agents distributed weapons and canisters of “Greek fire” to copperheads. Hines’s arson squad of southern soldiers who had escaped from Union prisons filtered back into the states and managed to destroy or damage a half-dozen military steamboats at St. Louis, an army warehouse at Mattoon, Illinois, and several hotels in New York City. They also carried out a daring raid across the border to rob the banks of St. Albans, Vermont. In an official report on his mission, Jacob Thompson claimed that subsidized copperheads had burned “a great amount of property” in northern cities. “[W]e must continue] to burn whenever it is practicable, and thus make the men of property feel their insecurity and tire them out with the war.”

The success of Canadian-based rebel operations, however, was inhibited by two contradictions. First, Hines and his colleagues were trying to prod peace Democrats into war against their own government. A few bellicose copperheads did hide caches of arms in anticipation of the glorious day of insurrection against Union arsenals and POW camps. But that day never came, for these “leaders” could not mobilize their followers. The vast army of Sons of Liberty ready to rise and overthrow

25. Thompson to Judah P. Benjamin, Dec. 3, 1864, in O.R., Ser. I, Vol. 43, pt. 2, pp. 930–36. Much of the information in this paragraph is drawn from Kinchen, Confederate Operations in Canada, and Nelson, Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric, which are scholarly studies based on captured Confederate documents and on the papers of Confederate officials; and from Horan, Confederate Agent, a somewhat sensationalized account heavily dependent on the memoirs of Hines and other Confederate agents. Even Frank Klement, the leading historian of the copperheads who considers most evidence of their conniving with rebels to be a tissue of “rumors, conjecture, and fancy” woven by Republicans for political purposes, admits that Confederate agents turned over money and arms to several Peace Democrats in 1864. Klement, Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War (Baton Rouge, 1984), 33, 154–77.