Prolonging the War for a Permanent Peace: Wisconsin Soldiers and the 1864 Election.

Scott Karel, author.

pp. 44-54

Oshkosh Scholar, Volume III, April 2008

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Office of Grants and Faculty Development
800 Algoma Blvd.
Oshkosh, WI 54901
(920) 424-3215
www.uwosh.edu/grants

Prolonging the War for a Permanent Peace: Wisconsin Soldiers and the 1864 Election

Scott Karel, author
Dr. Thomas Rowland, History, faculty adviser

Scott Karel graduated from UW Oshkosh in December 2007 with a degree in history. He began this project in the spring semester of 2007 as a research paper for a class about Lincoln's politics. The class was taught by Professor Siemers.

Dr. Thomas Rowland joined the UW Oshkosh history department as a lecturer in 1998. He has a Ph.D. from The George Washington University. He is the author of *In the Shadows of Grant and Sherman: George B. McClellan and Civil War History* (1999).

Abstract

The main focus of this essay was to find out what the motivations were for Civil War soldiers from Wisconsin in their choice for president in the 1864 election. The decision was a difficult one: they could either stay with the incumbent president or choose George McClellan, the former commander of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan was well-liked by the majority of his men, and through the summer of 1864 it appeared as though the Lincoln administration was not managing the war efficiently. An examination of the soldiers' journals and personal letters indicates that, although many men questioned Lincoln's capability to lead the Union to victory, the soldiers were forced to vote against McClellan after the Democratic Convention adopted a party platform that endorsed peace with the South at any cost.

On August 23, 1864, Abraham Lincoln sat at his desk and drafted a memorandum. After he was done, he sealed it and placed it in his desk, not opening it until after the presidential election in November of that year, when he read it to his staff. He wrote:

> This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that the Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards. (Gienapp, 2002, p. 205)

Lincoln, arguably one of the greatest presidents, doubted his chances at re-election fewer than three months before it was to take place. Yet taking a look at the election results from 1864, one can see that Lincoln won in a landslide. How could such a rapid change take place in fewer than three months?

One important reason was that at the time of Lincoln's memorandum, the war was not going well for the Union. Hundreds of thousands of men had died on both sides, and it looked like there was more blood to be spilled. Lincoln needed every vote he could muster, and everything seemed to hinge on the morale of the army. As of

August 1864, the Federal army was faltering. To make matters worse, the Democratic Party nominated George McClellan, former commander of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan was popular with the men who had served under him, and the Democrats were hoping that by taking the army vote, they could win back the presidency in 1864. The deck was clearly stacked against Lincoln. However, the soldiers' absentee ballots again showed overwhelming support for the commander-in-chief. Why would soldiers fighting in a costly war support a candidate with little military experience?

To figure out why there was such a large turnaround in support from August to November 1864, one must look to the Midwest. Soldiers from the upper Midwest, in particular Wisconsin, lacked the strong abolitionist movement of the Northeast. Only one out of 10 Wisconsin soldiers had strong feelings about seeing slavery end (Nesbit, 1989, p. 253). Many were perhaps fearful that freed Blacks would come north after the war and steal their jobs. Yet none of these issues seemed to concern soldiers as the election drew near.

As the fall presidential contest approached, the soldier's home state played a large role in how he voted. Soldiers from the Northeast were more likely to vote for Lincoln due to the large abolitionist movement found there. Soldiers from the Border States probably wanted to see the war conclude as quickly as possible—since it was being fought on their soil and some people living in these states still practiced slavery. Each of the soldiers in these states more than likely already had his mind made up about which candidate he wanted. This is why I feel it is important to focus on Wisconsin soldiers' thoughts on the election. While many historians have covered Wisconsin's involvement in the Civil War and the election of 1864, studies like Richard Current's *The History of Wisconsin* pay more attention to the state's civilian vote and give only a brief reference to the soldier vote. Little is known about what specifically drove Wisconsin soldiers to choose Lincoln.

The journals they kept in the field and letters they wrote to their friends and family back home indicated what issues mattered most to Wisconsin soldiers. I came to the conclusion that soldiers from Wisconsin were more concerned about how the war was to be fought. They overwhelmingly believed the South needed to be punished for seceding and that no terms of peace should be agreed on unless the Union was restored. The candidate who agreed with this outlook would receive their vote.

The soldiers knew Lincoln's war plans. Until the South was defeated, the war would continue. In order to court the pro-war Democratic voters, Lincoln and the Republicans even went so far as to change the party name to the National Union Party. At this time, the soldiers did not know whom the Democrats would choose for their candidate and what their platform would be. A carefully chosen platform and candidate who focused on peace along with the South's return could steal many soldiers' votes away from Lincoln. By mid-1864, soldiers were not yet convinced that Lincoln was the better man to lead the army. General Sherman had not yet made his famous drive into the heart of the South, and General Grant and the Army of the Potomac were stalled fighting Robert E. Lee in Virginia. The soldiers sensed the importance of the upcoming Democratic Convention in Chicago and were eager to hear its results.

Harrison Churchill was a member in Company G of the 32nd Wisconsin Regiment when he wrote a letter to his brother back home in Oxford, Wisconsin, on August 22, 1864. He was under the command of General William Tecumseh Sherman,

who had recently been put in charge of all the forces in the Western Theater of the war, between the Mississippi River and the Appalachian Mountains. Unlike their Eastern counterparts, soldiers in the West had seen much more military success against the rebel army. Of either of the two theaters of war, the soldiers fighting in the western states were more likely to support Lincoln due to the success and the fact they were far away from East Coast politics. Even those who favored Lincoln still doubted his chances. Churchill wrote:

> The coming election is much talked about and many of course think that if Lincoln is reelected that the war will certainly continue, others think if someone else could be put in for president that we would soon have the matter ended. No one but He who has control over all things can tell what would be the effect should Lincoln be reelected or not. One thing is certain that if he is elected that the South will know what to expect when if someone else were to take his place they might entertain the hope that there might be a possibility of their yet gaining the day. (Personal communication, 1864)

At this time, the soldiers did not know who the Democratic candidate would be and on what platform he would run. This made the approaching Democratic convention in Chicago a pivotal event for the upcoming election.

Others were equally eager to hear the results from Chicago. A soldier named John Davison wrote to his friend George Fairfield on August 28, 1864, saying: "Tomorrow is the day for the Chicago Convention and I suppose we will soon find out who our enemies in the North are . . . a big victory will give Lincoln the majority of votes in the army but with out I don't believe he can be elected in the army." Lincoln's job seemed to be in jeopardy; many soldiers were eager to hear a new candidate's ideas. Thus, to many Wisconsin soldiers, the entire election pivoted on the outcome of the Democratic Convention in Chicago.

The Democratic Party, however, was coming off a disappointing showing in the congressional and gubernatorial elections of 1863. On a larger scale, they still had to deal with the split between Northern and Southern Democrats, which had cost them the presidential election of 1860. Party leaders agreed that they needed a charismatic, popular leader in order to bring back party unity and have any chance of success in 1864. Democratic Party leader Samuel Cox believed the only person who could fit that role was former General of the Army of the Potomac George McClellan (Sears, 1988, p. 358).

McClellan, the on-again, off-again commander of the Union Army, was already well known for his contempt for President Lincoln and his administration. Despite Lincoln's disapproval of his approach to handling the war, the general was universally beloved by the troops who served under him. This made him a wise choice for a political party that was trying to deflect attention from its radical anti-war contingent. It was also a tactically sound move for trying to corner the critical soldier vote.

Many soldiers in the Eastern Theater of war supported their general and were shocked when Lincoln chose to remove McClellan from command of the Army of the Potomac. Lieutenant Jerry Flint, a River Falls native and a member of Company G of the 4th Wisconsin Infantry, wrote to his cousin Mira Powell on November 22, 1862:

> I am afraid the removal of McClellan will cause another defeat of our army. If we are driven back over the Potomac again I'm afraid our cause will be lost. The lives of many of our friends will have been given up for no gain.

Albert Morse of Grant County gave similar praise of the general on January 25, 1863: "There has never been a General thought so much of by his soldiers as George B. McClellan was by his, & I believe that McClellan can do more to day with the army of the Potomac than any other man." The men who served under McClellan were more than willing to put their complete trust in him. However, after Lincoln removed him from command of the Army of the Potomac for the second time, the general's political future was in doubt.

After his final dismissal from leading the Army of the Potomac, McClellan attempted to retreat from public life. However, when he went to West Point to dedicate a statue honoring the soldiers killed in the war, his commencement speech thrust him back into the political spotlight. He stated that the rebellion facing the country "cannot be justified upon ethical grounds, and the only alternatives for our choice are its suppression or the destruction of our nationality" (Waugh, 1997, p. 206). McClellan later solidified his stance on the war while expressing his opposition to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. He stated that an honorable peace was obtainable, but that this administration had lost sight of "the preservation of the Union, its constitution and its laws . . . and that issues have been brought into the foreground which should be entirely secondary, or are wrong or impossible of attainment" (Sears, 1988, p. 366). Although he publicly believed that no man should actively seek the presidency, he also believed that no one should refuse it if the position was presented to him. McClellan made it clear that he had no intention of running on a peace platform, yet in the end he agreed to accept the nomination.

Many Democrats, especially McClellan, claimed that Lincoln's insistence on emancipation unnecessarily prolonged the war. They believed that if the issue would simply be dropped, an honorable peace with the Confederacy could be agreed on much sooner. Since Lincoln decided to use emancipation as a requirement of reunion, many felt that the South would be more likely to prolong the war to keep slavery. Few Wisconsin soldiers were willing to sacrifice any more men just to allow slaves their freedom. Nearly all Wisconsin soldiers serving at this time had little stake in whether slavery continued, unlike the abolitionists and men serving the Union from the border slave states of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland. To many soldiers, this was an unnecessary war goal. In contrast to Lincoln, McClellan offered a position of reunion with slavery, and most Wisconsin soldiers would have accepted this offer.

Edwin Kimberly, a Brodhead native and member of the 3rd Wisconsin Band, described in a letter to his parents on August 24, 1864, the restlessness of the soldiers to hear from the Democratic Convention so that a better candidate than Lincoln might be chosen:

> We are anxiously waiting to hear from the Chicago Convention and it is the opinion of several in fact many that even the <u>nomination</u> of a good ticket. . . will naturally change the feeling both in the North and South and. . . . will ensure a speedy and honorable peace. The rebels will hear to no terms of peace under our present Administration.

> Should Lincoln be reelected it will undoubtedly prolong the war for he will sacrifice the last drop of white blood to save the accursed negro. . . We want no such man as this as the head of our government. The people, the country deserve a change of administration feeling assured that nothing but this will be instrumental in bringing about an honorable and speedy peace. I find the army universally against Lincoln. . . This awful war must close soon or what will become of us as a nation. I am not despondent as regards the saving of our country but the country I am confident that it can't be saved in truce, and at an awful expense of life and treasure.

Kimberly believed that Lincoln's insistence on emancipation was unnecessarily prolonging the war. If a good Democratic candidate could be nominated, he believed the candidate would undoubtedly win the election and would be able to bring a quick end to the fighting.

However, there was one section of the Democratic Party that both McClellan and his supporters hoped would not be active during the convention. The Copperheads, or Peace-Men, formed a small yet outspoken minority of the Democratic Party. These men were critical of the Lincoln administration, especially its use of the draft. They believed the war was a failure and their first priority was to end the war, even if it meant acknowledging Confederate independence. This stance caused the Wisconsin soldiers who were fighting to view them negatively, since many believed they wanted the war to end quickly to avoid being drafted and having to fight.

Soldiers such as John F. Brobst of the 25th Wisconsin often wrote home about their contempt of the men supporting the Democrats. Brobst wrote on September 6, 1864: "I could shoot a copperhead with as good hart as I could shoot a wolf." Brobst was explaining what he felt would happen if the soldiers were forced to come back to Wisconsin to enforce the draft. He continued, "I would shoot my father if he was one but thank god he is not one of the miseirablest of all God's creatures, a copperhead, a northern traitor." Other descriptions were just as unflattering. R. M. Perry called them "dam good-for-nothings that opposed the government, men who is too dam cowardly to go and fight for the north or south" (September 5, 1864). Clearly this was a political group McClellan and his supporters would have tried to quiet to ensure a victory, but they were probably going to have a presence at the Chicago Convention.

As the Democratic campaign progressed, it was becoming more likely that the candidate chosen in the convention had to please both sides of the party—the War Democrats and the Copperheads. Lincoln was aware of this, noting that the Democrats had the choice of either nominating a peace man on a war platform or a war man on a peace platform (Sears, 1988, p. 368). Since McClellan was a former Union general and favored continuing the war until an honorable peace could be obtained, his selection forced the party either to adopt a peace platform or risk yet another split. This would give them no chance against Lincoln.

The Democratic Convention was initially scheduled to take place on July 4, 1864. However, by mid-June, war-weariness in the North seemed to be at an all-time high. Many in the party thought it foolish to hold the convention and pick a platform so soon when it was possible that a change in the war's progress might cause public opinion to shift in the four months that stood between the convention and the election.

Their pro-war candidate was aware that some in the party hoped that continued military failures would allow them to adopt a stronger peace platform (Sears, 1988, p. 369). Much to the dismay of McClellan, the convention was pushed back to August 29.

By the time the convention started, the Copperheads used the fear of another split to their advantage. This peace wing was led by Clement Vallandigham, who a year earlier had been banished to the Confederacy for publicly denouncing the administration's policies. He traveled back to the states through Canada just in time to attend the Democratic Convention. Vallandigham did not like McClellan as a candidate because of his pro-war stance, and it was his mission to bring the party back to a plank that better suited his personal preferences. Under his leadership, this small peace wing gained significant power in the convention, even allowing Vallandigham to be part of the committee in charge of writing the platform. In this capacity, he created one of the most pivotal positions of either campaign. He inserted a resolution stating that the war up to this point had been a failure and claimed that public welfare demanded that it end as soon as possible. Shocked, McClellan's followers tried to change the strategy to peace only with reunion, but Vallandigham and his supporters in the committee voted it down. He used the Democratic Party's fear of yet another split to quiet most opposition to his peace platform. To further complicate things, the Democrats nominated George H. Pendleton as vice president (Sears, 1988, p. 374). Like Vallandigham, Pendleton was a peace Democrat from Ohio, and his nomination further linked McClellan to the Copperheads despite his personal convictions.

The adopted peace platform put McClellan in a compromised position. He had publicly and privately stated that he would not accept the nomination if it were based on a peace platform. He could have taken a stance and refused the nomination, but decided to refute his party's platform and run on his own principles. In his acceptance speech, he assured the people that he would consider peace with the Confederacy only if they agreed to rejoin the Union (Sears, 1988, pp. 375-376). Unfortunately for McClellan, the mere linking of himself to Pendleton and the Copperheads made every previous claim he made concerning peace irrelevant to the majority of the soldiers. The stigma of peace at any cost was now synonymous with his name, and Wisconsin soldiers believed that this type of peace would be neither honorable nor lasting. This made Lincoln and his coalition Union party a more attractive option.

Soldiers who may have thought of McClellan as pro-Union were quickly changing their minds. For example, Omro's James F. Sawyer was asked when he believed the war would end. He said: ". . . if Mr. Lincoln is elected we will have four years of war and blood shed, and if McClellan is elected we will have a dishonorable and cowardly surrender and so I would prefer Mr. Lincoln after all because surrender does not sound agreeable to my ear" (November 10, 1864). Although Sawyer was not initially inclined to vote for Lincoln, given the options he would be the better candidate. For others, it was difficult to comprehend why McClellan would be a part of such a shameful platform. "I did think once that little Mack was a good Union man," wrote R. M. Perry to his brother on September 20, 1864. "I don't know what is yet but I think if he was, he never would go in that da--copperhead peace snake platform. So I think he can't be much of a man." Soldiers took out their anger on the commander who appeared to abandon them during the fight, although McClellan did not agree with the principle of peace at any cost.

Jerry Flint, who had previously feared that removing McClellan from the command of the Army of the Potomac could lead to defeat, began to change his mind. He wrote to his brother on September 26, 1864:

> The boys talk politics considerable now the "Chicago" Platform is being distributed freely through the camp. McClellan's stock does not run into very high figures but he still has some "bidders." His letter of acceptance is source enough, but the platform, on which he stands, I do not think, will bear him up through the courses. He is a very good man but has fell into some bad company. . . I think I shall vote for Abraham.

Flint's comments again illustrate that for many soldiers, Lincoln was not the first choice for president, but rather that he was the better option.

Even after the convention and the conquering of Atlanta, Charles M. Smith of the 16th Wisconsin regiment remained fearful that McClellan would capture the coveted army vote. He told his father in a letter on September 14, 1864, that "McClellan has a great many friends I find in the army & if the army should decide the matter little McClellan would be elected with an overwhelming majority—for my part I want to see Abe Lincoln run in again." At this time, Smith did not realize how much damage had been done to McClellan's campaign in the eyes of the soldiers.

Homer Levings of the 12th Wisconsin felt that the Democratic platform had clearly drawn a line in the sand. He now realized which candidate would get his support. Levings noted to his parents on September 18, 1864:

> All the talk is about the election and the military campaigns . . . Lincoln and Johnson's election is looked upon with far more confidence than awhile ago. The hellish designs of the Peace Democracy & Copperheads are clearly understood, we know what they intend. The Chicago platform of those men is a very nice thing on the outside. . . McClellan says he will make "the constitution and the laws the rule of his conduct." Yet, he knows that to outstep the limits of the Constitution as Mr. Lincoln is doing, will crush the rebellion forever. He knows this is the only & right way to do it but for the sake of policy, the interest of Democracy, both North & South, that it may raise into power. He pledges himself to make the "Constitution and laws the rule of his conduct." No wonder his supporters are pleased.... The Union on the basis of dishonorable peace, though they do not say so, is far better than that the war should go on till the rebels are made to accept out own terms and the Union thus be preserved. Their platform is only a mask of their real designs.

The thought of a peace that included Southern independence was unimaginable to the men. The soldiers would not allow their years of sacrifice to be made worthless by allowing the South to become an independent nation.

A common theme emerged among the majority of Wisconsin soldiers. They desired a candidate who would make sure the war was fought until the South surrendered. Given the platform adopted at the Chicago Convention, Abraham Lincoln appeared to be the candidate they desired. Strengthening this view was the recent success fighting against the rebel army. The day after McClellan accepted

the Democratic nomination, whose plank stated that the war was a complete failure, General Sherman took Atlanta. Suddenly, it looked like the Federal Army could succeed. Every thrust that Sherman made into the heart of the South, besides weakening Southern resolve, made the Democratic platform seem more outrageous. Soldiers who did the fighting and saw first-hand the success now became offended that any party could create such a platform and that a soldier like McClellan would accept the nomination based on it.

On October 7, 1864, John Davidson wrote another letter to his friend George Fairfield with a more optimistic view of Lincoln's chances to receive the army vote:

> The topic on the Presidential campaign has some what abated since the late victories and those who were in favor of giving the South their Independence rather than elect a war man are quite silent and very few has any doubt in regard to Abe Lincoln being Re-elected.

This new optimism was also found in the thoughts of Edward Levings, the brother of Homer Levings. Shortly after taking part in the fall of Atlanta, Edward wrote back home to River Falls that every victory ". . . while it adds to the discouragement and demoralization of their armies, adds to the discomfort and shame of the 'peace men' at home. This war could not go on much beyond this year, for I feel that our victories and the coming election will give the rebels and 'peace men' such a quietus that they will give up the struggle as a lost game" (September 24, 1864).

The Democratic platform of peace at any cost seemed unnecessarily defeatist now that the Union had the Confederacy on the ropes. This platform did, however, give hope to one group of people. Confederate soldiers now saw the election of McClellan as their only hope to salvage their independence. The Union soldiers soon became aware of this, and many who were facing a difficult decision about voting against their former commander became convinced. This perspective appears in the letters of two former supporters of McClellan. Late in 1862, Jerry Flint feared that the removal of McClellan from command of the Army of the Potomac could lead to a Union defeat. However, on October 11, 1864, he noted to his mother that "all the rebels we capture say that their only hope is the election of McClellan." Albert Morse agreed. On October 13, 1864, he described to his sister Mattie a dialogue between Union and rebel soldiers across the lines:

> Some of our boys Hurrahed for Lincoln & they [rebels] wished him in that bad place that the good book tells about but to cap all some of them hurrahed for little Mac which I think shows plain enough who ought to be our next president.

For many Wisconsin soldiers, picking the right candidate for themselves was not good enough. Numerous soldiers made it their mission to campaign for Lincoln and to change the mind of any man in their camp who planned to vote for McClellan. James Nugent noted while training at Camp Randall: "It is strange how soldiering changes a persons politics. Good McClellan men come here, and in two weeks they are loud for Old Abe" (October 1, 1864). Campaigning did not focus solely on men in the field. R. M. Perry concluded a letter to his brother saying, "Do your best for old Abe in election. Every man who votes against him is a soldier's enemy, so vote for old Abe and Johnson" (November 1, 1864). Others, like James F. Sawyer, made it their mission to talk men out of voting for McClellan. On November 10, 1864, he wrote:

"We had two more copperheads in our Co. but they would not vote for either candidate because I endeavored to show to them their folly in voting for a party so dishonorable and disgraceful." However, not every soldier was convinced that Lincoln was the right candidate.

Those whose minds could not be changed were chastised, especially when it came time to vote in early November. Voting in an election was not as private of a matter as it is today. Men would approach a table and select either a Democratic or Union party card and place it in the ballot box. This method of voting made the men in the company aware of whom their comrades had chosen. Churchill described those loyal to McClellan:

> They are like donkeys among fine noble horses . . . I have often wished that such men were obliged to stand side by side with the Johnnies, in front of our guns and let them try their hands in the business of trying to conquer the North. (Personal communication, November 10, 1864)

On November 8, 1864, Edward Levings described McClellan voters with similar degrading remarks:

> Most all of the men who went for McClellan & Pendleton are recruits, or men who do not know enough to poll an intelligent vote. I was clerk of our Co. election and I know who voted the Democratic ticket and will vouch that those men actually do not know enough to give an intelligent vote. I never saw one of them with a newspaper in their hands. One man wanted to vote the Dem ticket, but was so ashamed that he would not vote. Another was much ashamed, but stung with rage because laughed at by his comrades, did vote for the wonderful little Mac. There were just three men of Co. "A" who voted for him. I wish I could paint them as they looked . . . Each one put in his contemptible ticket and sneaked away like a dog with his tail between his legs, not daring to look a man in the face . . . A man who votes for McClellan is looked upon by his comrades as an ignoramus or a coward & wants to get out of service & so voted for Mac.

Most men were swollen with pride at how their company had voted. As the election results from the different states began coming in, soldiers were relieved to see that the majority of the country had voted as they had. With the election behind them, the men could focus on finishing the job they had started: defeating the rebel army.

Many wrote home to tell how their company had voted. The 29th Wisconsin's Marcus Wheeler took the opportunity to rub in the election results to members of his family back home who had doubted Lincoln:

> I am proud to say it, —and am ready to avow it from the housetops. But the "Little Mackerels" were so much ashamed of their position . . . and have no reason to give for voting as they did except Dey had fought long enough—and want to have Peace and go home!!! We are "Peace men" too but not anxious to give the South Independence …. (Personal communication, November 8, 1864).

Although it is unlikely that, if elected, McClellan would have granted the South independence, no one, especially the soldiers, was willing to take a chance. Hartford

native Lloyd Nanscawen, private in the 29th Wisconsin volunteer infantry, said he felt "proud of our Co., for every man had common sense enough to vote for Lincoln ...." He added, "...it does the soldier good to hear the different election returns from the different States, for nearly all have gone right for us, and I feel quite certain that this year will close the war" (November 12, 1864). Even Edwin Kimberly, the band member who in late August had said that the army was universally against Lincoln and wished to see a change, now believed Lincoln was the right choice. On November 11, 1864, he wrote: "We hear very little of election news yet what we do hear is very flattering indeed. Three fourths of the Army are for Lincoln. The Chicago Platform has placed McClellan in obscurity—we would have voted for him had it been for this." The soldiers would have no peace without reunion, which is exactly what the Chicago platform expressed. The men would never vote for anyone who would be associated with such a platform, causing most of them to side with Abraham Lincoln.

Although the soldier vote was not needed to give Lincoln the majority in Wisconsin, it still remained a close election. Had McClellan been able to run on a platform that mirrored his principles, despite the late military success, the vote would have been much closer. If the absentee soldier vote had been in McClellan's favor by 5,000 votes, it would have allowed him to take the state of Wisconsin. This is because the civilian vote was 65,000 to 61,000 in favor of Lincoln (Klement, 1997, p. 122). Many other states with similar close election results might also have gone for McClellan had his platform been different, quite possibly giving him enough electoral votes to gain the presidency.

The descriptions of events in the soldiers' journals and letters home offer some of the only remaining glimpses into their minds as they made their way through the difficult period of the Civil War. Like the war itself, the 1864 election was not guaranteed to go any particular way. The common soldier especially had a hard time choosing between the incumbent president and the beloved general. Wisconsin soldiers offer a unique perspective. The common soldier from rural Wisconsin had nothing vested in the practice of slavery. Although many thought it was wrong, they did not care to see it as a condition of reunion. This is why, for many Wisconsin soldiers, Abraham Lincoln was not their first choice as president. Anyone who could offer a better solution would have probably received their vote. Had George McClellan not been forced to adopt a peace at any cost platform, he might have carried the soldier vote. Instead soldiers voted for the candidate who served their number one goal—to keep the war going until the South reunited with the North.

References

Brobst, J. F. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, Wisconsin Historical Society [WHS].

Churchill, H. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Current, R. (1977). *The history of Wisconsin: The Civil War Era, 1848-1873, Vol 2*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press.

Davidson, J. C. (1844 -1906). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Flint, J. (1862). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

_____. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Gienapp, W. E. (2002). *This fiery trial: The speeches and writings of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kimberly, E. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Klement, F. L. (1997). *Wisconsin in the Civil War*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press.

Levings, E. D. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, River Falls Area Research Center.

Morse, A. C. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Nanscawen, L. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Nesbit, R. C. (1989). *Wisconsin: A history.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Nugent, J. H. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Perry, R. M. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Sawyer, J. F. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Sears, S. W. (1988). *George B. McClellan: The young Napoleon*. New York: Ticknor & Fields.

Smith, C. M. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.

Waugh, J. C. (1997). *Reelecting Lincoln: The battle for the 1864 presidency*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Wheeler, M. (1864). Unpublished correspondence, WHS.