

Jefferson Davis vs Abraham Lincoln

Comparing the Commanders in Chief (Expanded)

Almost all histories of warfare ultimately end up with comparative studies of the respective national leaders of the respective combatants. Few, if any, warring nations prevail without strong, effective leadership by or from their commanders in chief. And to even to try to make a comparison between Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis might seem to be an examination of the obvious. After all Lincoln, who almost uniquely among all U.S. presidents served his entire term during a time of conflict -- ironically Obama is now another exception--, is now generally proclaimed as one of the nation's greatest presidents. On the other hand, Davis is often given little if any regard as a leader, sometimes unkindly relegated to the proverbial dustbin of history. Even among the devotees of Southern heritage Davis' legacy is almost always surpassed by Robert E. Lee's. Nevertheless it might be pertinent to review the respective records of these two presidents who served during one of the most tumultuous times in our history to try to determine what made them and their records different from one another, and to ask whether the disparity of rankings between them is actually that pronounced or justified.

We can start our examination by reviewing their respective backgrounds:

About Davis

At first blush it might seem that Davis had the superior credentials to be ideally suited to become a commander in chief. Born in 1808 in Christian (now called Fairview) County, Kentucky, but moved with his family to a modest plantation in Mississippi where he enjoyed the friendship of his family's slaves, he was an 1828 West Point graduate, finishing 23rd in a class of 33 classmates. Although Davis became one of Zachary Taylor's favorite lieutenants, his high-strung emotional demeanor and lack of promotions caused him to be dissatisfied with army life before resigning after seven years. After serving in the U.S. House of Representatives -- where he became known for his passionate and charismatic speeches -- Davis returned to active duty during the Mexican War to lead a volunteer regiment to successes at Monterrey and Buena Vista. He served four years in the U.S. Senate before becoming Franklin Pierce's Secretary of War in 1853 where he pressed for the introduction of the Minie` ball as well as for the adoption of the rifled musket.

Davis also envisioned and saw to the formation of a new cavalry regiment, the 2nd U.S. Cavalry, nicknamed Jeff Davis' Own, largely comprised of an extraordinary group of officers, including E. Kirby Smith, William J. Hardee, Earl Van Dorn, Albert Sidney Johnston, Robert E. Lee, George Thomas, Nathan G. "Shanks" Evans, John Bell Hood, and George Stoneman. Sixteen of the regiment's officers became Civil War generals. This was no parade ground honor guard but instead was assigned to fight Indians and Mexican outlaws in the barren plains of Texas.

After his four-year stint as Secretary of War Davis returned to the U. S. Senate where he became one of its leading statesmen. Known as fashionably dressed and handsome who cut quite a figure in the Senate, he was a refined, well-read man who impressed all. Described as someone who "carried himself with such an air of conscious strength and ease and purpose ... to cause a stranger to turn and look at him."

By 1858 few men in the nation's capital had grown more in stature as an effective public figure. He had become one of the country's most eloquent speakers with a rich voice. Davis had replaced the venerated John C. Calhoun as the South's champion of states' rights and had skillfully managed the Southern faction in the discussions and behind-the-scenes politicking in support of the Kansas question.

However, Davis also had some character and personality traits that would not bode well for a national leader. He had a hot temper that often meant he was eager to fight; for instance at least eight times he was in arguments that almost led to duels. He could also be oversensitive to criticism while tending to be indecisive. And while he exhibited blind loyalty to men he admired, he could also use extremely poor judgment of the abilities of others, meaning that he would remain firmly committed to several poor generals such as Leonious Polk and Braxton Bragg. These traits would eventually seriously handicap anyone desperately trying to lead a nascent nation against overwhelming odds of success.

Unfortunately for someone who was about to undertake the daunting responsibilities as President of a fledging nation, Davis suffered from extremely poor health. He still had occurrences of the malaria that killed his first wife; he had a corneal ulceration that left him virtually blind in his left eye. Additionally he endured severe neuralgia that caused severe pain, nausea, and headaches. As if those maladies were not enough his other miseries included bronchial problems, insomnia, digestive disorders, and boils.

About Lincoln



Lincoln on 1846

Based upon recently disclosed records, some historians have concluded that Lincoln's experience as a practicing attorney went a long ways toward preparing him for presidential leadership. A common perception might be that Lincoln rose directly from a backwoods rail splitter to presidential candidate while preparing a few wills and some deeds along the way. Instead, although he had a hardscrabble early life and although his legal career had humble beginnings, for instance riding circuit twice each year in Central Illinois, he soon became one of the leading, busiest attorneys throughout Illinois, all the while carefully cultivating his political standing throughout the Midwest.

Lincoln was an extremely intelligent man – a “towering genius” -- who was seldom intimidated. Almost always the smartest man in the room, Lincoln had a strong sense of discipline. He was highly competitive and tenacious, even ruthless, but not win-at-all-costs. Lincoln always strove for the best results for his client, but he, not the client, controlled the management of the case. In fact he seldom became too close to his clients.

Lincoln was involved in approximately 5,000 court cases. Many of his cases -- as many as 2,500 -- involved some form of debt litigation, mostly promissory notes. But Lincoln was also involved in a wide variety of other types of cases, including 500 cases involving division of a dead man's property, 100 divorce cases, and 194 criminal law cases, ranging from 70 small scale larceny cases to murder cases. Another important area of his practice involved “energy men,” e.g. start-up businessmen, hustlers, and/or investors. These cases often also involved resolutions of debt.

In the final decade of his practice his firm handled between 17 and 34 percent of all local cases. He was the attorney of record in four cases before the U.S. Supreme Court as well as 254 cases before the Illinois Supreme Court.

In order to prevail in a civil war a nation's leader must have a strong political sense. After Lincoln's death his former law partner, William Herndon, wrote: "It was in the world of politics that he lived. Politics were his life, newspapers were his food, and his great ambition his motive power." Lincoln was a seasoned stump speaker, beginning at the age of 23 when he campaigned for other Whig candidates, and continuing long after the demise of the Whigs and the emergence of the Republican Party in 1855.

Lincoln served one term in the U.S. House of Representative when he opposed involvement in the Mexican War. Other than serving as a captain of a volunteer unit during the Black Hawk War, Lincoln had no military training or experience.

The Wives



Varina Howell Davis

The beautiful Varina Howell Davis, Jefferson's second wife and sixteen years his junior, was one of the most cultivated women of her time who charmed a wide circle of Washington dignitaries. William Seward and Charles Sumner were two of her greatest admirers. More than a popular and active hostess, she became Jefferson's goodwill ambassador, working hard to help him win friends and influence governmental officials. Hard working upon her husband's behalf, she helped with his correspondence, read several newspapers each day to stay abreast, and was willing to meet with anybody at the Davis' home to talk about his bills or policies.

In contrast, Mary Lincoln often created problems for her husband. For beginners, Mary had several Southern connections; a full brother, three half-brothers, and three brothers-in-law joined the Confederate army. Mary's half sister was married to Benjamin Hardin Helm, a Confederate general who was killed at Chickamauga. Unfortunately Mary tended to be a spendthrift who would travel to New York City to purchase clothing and other personal items that cost far beyond the president's salary; she also ordered extravagant refurbishing of the White House that had not been authorized. Although Lincoln managed to cover all these expenditures they were distractions that he could ill afford.

But Mary's personality traits were often more problematic. Although she could be charming she also suffered from wide mood swings and public outbursts that embarrassed, even mortified the President. She had an overbearing need to get what she wanted regardless of how others could be hurt or inconvenienced. On occasion she exploded in jealous rages whenever she perceived that wives of generals or other officials were showing too much attention to the President, none of which were helpful to the President who tried to foster good relationships within his administration.



Mary Todd Lincoln

Davis as President



Jefferson Davis

The new Confederacy, at first without the four upper South states of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas, had only ten percent of the nation's White population and only five percent of its industrial capacity. Representatives from six of the seven original seceding states hastily organized the Confederate government in Montgomery, Alabama. That convention, which had adopted a constitution limiting the president to one term of six years, unanimously elected Jefferson Davis as provisional president. Although Davis had not sought the office and did not really want it, preferring to have a military command, his sense of duty compelled him to accept. He was elected to a full six-year term in the fall of 1861.

At first blush it might seem that Davis would have an easier task than would Lincoln since The South would "merely" have to defend territory that the North would have to conquer in order to prevail; being on the defensive

within interior lines should have meant the Confederacy would have shorter, easier to sustain lines of communications. Nevertheless, from the beginning of his term Davis knew, or at least probably knew, that his challenges would be daunting. While many of the fire eaters predicted any war would result in a quick and easy victory for the South, based upon his experience as Secretary of War Davis realized the North had several important advantages such as greater manpower and industrial strength.

He also quickly had to form and organize an entirely new administration. Moreover, the new government was fraught with divisions; many of the states were still deeply divided over the issue of secession with non-slaveholding citizens resentful about the political dominance of slaveholders. Among the states there were apprehensions, even suspicions, about their new central government. And there deep divisions among the office holders; for instance Davis' vice-president, Alexander Stephens, did not approve of Davis and would increasingly become a thorn in Davis's side. Unfortunately for Davis, and by extension for the fate of the Confederacy, Davis simply did not possess the right management skills to overcome these obstacles. To use a contemporary term, Davis' lack of sufficient people skills impeded his ability to be an effective leader of the fractious Confederacy.

In a sense Davis was severely challenged by the essential structure of the quickly assembled Confederate government. The strong sentiment for states' rights impeded national unity, reflected in the composition of his cabinet whose members would often quarrel among themselves as well as with Davis. Frequently various governors complained that troops from their states were being used in other states.

Reflecting his inability to maintain good, stable relationships with deputies, during his four years as President Davis had six secretaries of war, plus five attorney generals and four secretaries of state. Until it was too late to matter, he resisted appointing a general-in-chief. Despite being bedridden at times he was a workaholic who felt compelled to handle an infinite amount of minor matters or paperwork, becoming too involved in personnel and tactical details; Davis regularly broke his chain of command by going around his secretary of war to make personnel changes or his field commanders to transfer units. Davis' effectiveness as a leader was also impaired by his feuds with state governors and generals, his neglect of civil matters in favor of military issues, and his resistance to public opinion. Given his experience and frankly the lack of help from his cabinet and other administrators in

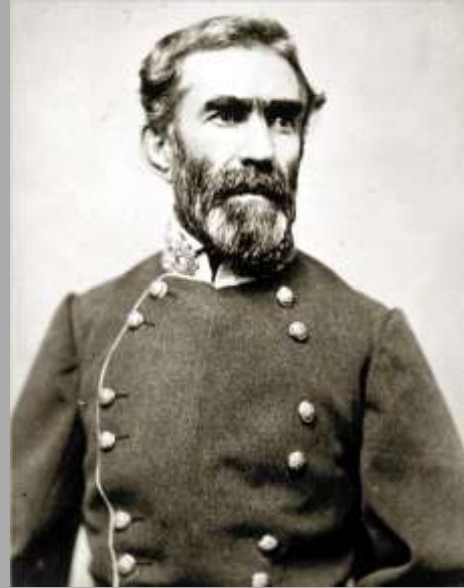
Richmond it is natural and understandable why he would have extended himself beyond the customary role of a commander in chief.

Davis' position was temporarily strengthened after Fort Sumter; Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the rebellion prompted four more states, including the dominant state of Virginia, to join the newly unified Confederacy. Initially Davis was a popular President with the Southern population. He had a dignified bearing, a distinguished military record, extensive experience in political affairs, and was dedicated to the Confederate cause. Plus, fortune seemed to smile upon the new Confederacy during its early stages.

But any cohesion within the Confederacy soon began to fray around the edges; Davis simply did not have the personality or inclination to sustain support among the wide range of secessionist characters, many of whom -- to put it kindly -- were alcohol fueled hotheads. (See article titled "Some Secessionists Personalities" elsewhere on this website.) He was impatient with many subordinates, especially those whom he didn't like in the first place. For instance, P.T.G. Beauregard, who had commanded the bombardment of Fort Sumter and who had led the defense at Bull Run, began to grate upon the genteel nature of the Richmond government before being dispatched out west where he succeeded in command at Shiloh after Albert Sidney Johnston was killed. Beauregard then led a retreat back to Corinth where, to Davis' surprise and displeasure, Beauregard took unauthorized sick leave. Davis then replaced Beauregard with Braxton Bragg, Davis' friend from their Mexican War experiences. Beauregard, despite his capacity as a combat commander, would then be put and remain on the proverbial shelf until the remaining months of the war.

But conversely Davis' loyalty to Bragg was the cause of widespread discontent among the Confederacy's high command, especially in the Western theater. Bragg was an able organizer and tactician but he was also quarrelsome, mean tempered, and abusive to his subordinates, especially the rank-and-file. After relieving Beauregard, Bragg continued to command the Southern Army of Tennessee. He cleverly outflanked Buell into Kentucky but paused long enough to forfeit any chance to attack Louisville, his presumed target. After scoring a tactical victory at Perryville he began a long, arduous retreat before Buell became discouraged to return to Nashville. After Rosecrans relieved Buell as commander of the newly re-designated Army of the Cumberland the armies fought a bloody battle at Stones' River before

Bragg once again retreated. After continuing to retreat across Tennessee and back into Georgia, Bragg was almost able to trap and defeat much of Rosecrans' scattered army in detail but the insubordination of Bragg's commanders scuttled those opportunities. Bragg, with considerable help from James Longstreet -- sent from Lee's army to reinforce Bragg -- then scored an impressive victory at Chickamauga that almost destroyed the Army of the Cumberland before it could escape into the safety of Chattanooga.



Braxton Bragg

While conducting a siege against the Federal army the Confederate commanders were in near revolt against Bragg, contending with some justification that he had failed to aggressively pursue the vanquished Federals. The rancor among Bragg's command became so toxic that Davis decided to make the difficult trip via rail to see firsthand what could be done to resolve these difficulties. However Davis only made matters worse when he asked Bragg's subordinate generals to voice their complaint in front of Bragg before Davis incredibly decided to retain Bragg in command.

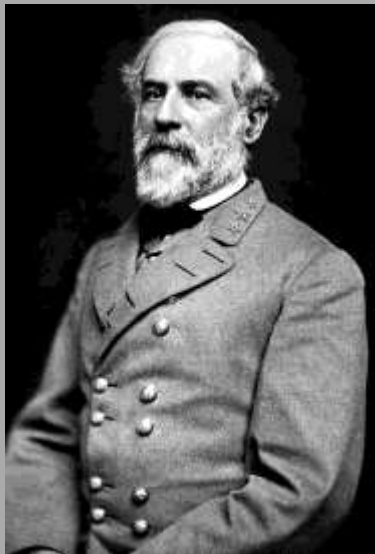
After the Federals broke out of Chattanooga at Missionary Ridge, Bragg was forced to retreat back to Dalton, Georgia, where his army encamped for the winter. (Bragg had not helped his army's situation during the Chattanooga siege when he devoted so much effort retaliating against those generals who had complained about him.) At this point Davis had no choice but to reluctantly replace Bragg with Joe Johnston with whom Davis already had a rancorous relationship.

Although Johnston had been the second highest ranking Federal general to defect to the Confederate army, Davis had made the proud, prickly Johnston the fifth highest ranking Confederate general, something that irritated Johnston for the rest of his life. In early 1862 after Johnston assumed command of the Confederates' main army in Virginia, Johnston confounded Davis by hastily retreating from Manassas, thus forfeiting valuable supplies and equipment. Davis was aghast by Johnston's subsequent retreat up the Peninsula in face of McClelland's slow advance toward Richmond. Throughout

his various commands Johnston refused to keep Davis advised about Johnston's plans or strategies.

Neither did Davis and Johnston see eye-to-eye about how to defend against Sherman's Atlanta campaign; Davis was opposed to conceding any territory while Johnston believed he was almost compelled to retreat against Sherman's overwhelming numbers that could usually outflank Johnston's positions. After Johnston retreated nearly to Atlanta, Davis replaced Johnston with John Bell Hood, a move that rankled the rank-and-file who usually felt Johnston gave high priority to preserving his troop strength in contrast to the much more aggressive, even reckless Hood.

Commissary-General Lucius Northrop was another Davis crony who was allowed to remain in his post far too long. They had met while at West Point and later as second lieutenants serving in Missouri had become fast friends. Northrop had several good qualities such as honesty and a belief in economy in government. However he had no experience, even as a quartermaster, to prepare him to run large organizations or bureaucracies. Unable to overcome these handicaps he was widely regarded of gross incompetency, becoming one of the most hated and vilified men in the Confederacy. Davis allowed Northrop to retain his position until early 1865.



Robert E. Lee

Davis had a much different relationship with Robert E. Lee, one of those generals whom Davis had given a higher ranking than Johnston's. Without much doubt Lee was the Confederates' most successful commander, a factor that almost certainly gave him considerable leeway from Davis. But Lee, in contrast with several other Confederate generals, cultivated and maintained a comfortable, constructive relationship with Davis. For instance Lee was always deferential to and circumstantial with Davis, going out of his way to keep Davis informed of Lee's location and status. On the other hand, Lee sometimes had his own notion about initiating campaigns that invaded Northern territory. Davis was usually hesitant to fight outside the South's territory while Lee projected advantages to taking the fight to the North. However Lee never directly confronted his chief about those issues but instead fudged his intentions. No doubt Davis, no fool when it came to military

matters, realized Lee's objectives when he ventured into Maryland and/or Pennsylvania but simply acquiesced as Lee moved across the Potomac River.

One important responsibility of a commander in chief is to establish the national objective, and in this regard Davis was clear and firm: To preserve the independence of the Confederacy. Otherwise some might be, and have been, critical of Davis' obsession with detail that caused him to be immersed in endless trivial matters. On the other hand, to the very end he never wavered in his determination that the Confederacy would become and continue to be an independent nation, even though that national objective was totally irreconcilable with Lincoln's national objective of maintaining the Union.

Davis gave speeches to soldiers and politicians but largely ignored the common people allowing widespread discontent to fester. Many non-slave owning Southerners came to view the Civil War as a rich man's war but a poor man's fight. Rather than trying to rally the people with stirring rhetoric Davis called for people to be fatalistic and to be prepared to die for this new country.

As Commander-in-Chief, Davis' record was probably better than we might suppose but still he was responsible for many strategic mistakes. He grossly underestimated the future impact of the Federal blockade. Initially he insisted on a strategy of defending the entire South on an equal basis while the North concentrated upon specific targets such as the 1862 capture of New Orleans, the South's largest city and one of its busiest ports. He allowed Lee to twice invade the North when Confederate armies in the West were under tremendous pressure. Within five months of Hood's leadership, the Army of Tennessee, the Confederacy's second largest army, was virtually destroyed. A recent article in *Civil War Times* ranked Hood's appointment as one of the five decisions that doomed the Confederacy. Davis also failed to insist that Forrest be used to attack and disrupt Sherman's extenuated lines of communications. And despite warnings from several civilian and military advisors, Davis paid little attention to the massive food shortages and the deleterious effect such shortages were causing through much of the entire Confederacy, including support for his administration.

For whatever it may be worth Beauregard -- who quickly developed an antagonistic relationship with Davis -- summarized Davis' as well as the Confederacy's deficiencies when the Cajun said:

We needed for President either a military man of high order, or a politician of the first class without military pretensions. The South did not fall crushed by the mere weight of the North; but it was nibbled away at all side and ends, because its executive head never gathered and wielded its great strength under the ready advantages that greatly reduced or adversary's naked physical superiority.

Davis' initial popular support grossly eroded during the war's final chapters, especially given the losses of Tennessee and Georgia. Political leaders in and out of Richmond were expressing doubts about Davis' physical and mental capacities to continue the fight. His relationship with the Confederate Congress had become dysfunctional while old nemeses such as Alexander Stephens and Joseph Brown, Georgia's governor, were relentless in their criticisms. Predictably many wanted Lee to take Davis' place, although to be fair Lee never expressed any desire to assume such responsibilities.

Sometimes there might be a very thin line between resoluteness and delusion, and there is ample evidence that Davis clearly slipped over that line, especially as the Confederacy was collapsing. Although given timely and sufficient warning by Lee that Richmond might have to be evacuated, Davis did nothing to prepare for that eventuality. Even as Davis was trying to escape southward, and after Lee had surrendered at Appomattox while Sherman was marching against the remnants of southern forces, Davis clung to the irrational, unrealistic belief that somehow the Confederacy could survive if only he could cross the Mississippi River to join Kirby Smith's last remaining Confederate army.

Lincoln as President

Other than his experience as a successful attorney, Lincoln seemingly came to the presidency about as ill-prepared as could be imagined. While travelling by train to Washington prior to his inauguration Lincoln repeatedly made statements to suggest that he did not even take the rebellion seriously. He was barely acquainted with his Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, a corrupt politician who had been appointed only because one of Lincoln's campaign managers had made a deal to obtain Pennsylvania's electoral votes. Cameron's actions caused frequent embarrassments to Lincoln who in January 1862 surprised Cameron by appointing to be Minister to Russia, replacing Cameron with Edwin Stanton, formerly a harsh critic of Lincoln and his policies.



In contrast to today's practice of transition teams and briefings to enhance, if not assure, that the incoming president would be fully advised of the problems and challenges of his new office, there was little contact or other disclosure between Buchanan's administration and Lincoln's people. Thus Lincoln had little idea of the military assets that would be available to him should actual hostilities erupt.

As thoroughly and masterfully described by Doris Kearns Goodwin in *Team of Rivals*, the balance of Lincoln's cabinet was comprised of successful politicians who had little if any military background. The

Secretary of State, William Seward, had had the audacity to presume that he would serve the equivalent of a prime minister running the day to day operations of government, including military matters. However, Lincoln quickly and adroitly disarmed Seward of any notions that Lincoln would be relinquishing any Constitutional authorities as commander in chief; even though he did not attain status as prime minister, Seward grew to become one of Lincoln's most trusted advisors.

Once it became clear that the nation was involved in a civil war, and that he would not be getting much credible assistance either from the military or civilian authorities, Lincoln began to educate himself on military matters and issues by borrowing heavily from the Library of Congress. Extensive research had long been a hallmark of Lincoln's legal practice and so eventually Lincoln had gained a firmer grasp on military strategy than did almost all his commanders. In essence Lincoln quickly came to the realization that the war could be won only by destroying the enemy's military forces; in contrast the prevailing philosophy among his generals was that of a soft war that, at the risk of oversimplification, held that the war could be won simply by a succession of battlefield victories after which the vanquished opponent could escape to be able to fight another day.

Because Lincoln had had no close relationships with Federal generals it was relatively easy for him to dismiss those generals who failed to measure up to his expectations. He once commented that selecting a general was "like

putting one's hand in a sack to get one eel from a dozen snakes." Lincoln was especially impatient with his Eastern theater commanders, replacing Irwin McDowell in less than five months; George McClellan -- in his first stint -- roughly after a year; John Pope scarcely two months; McClellan -- second stint -- a little more than two months; Ambrose Burnside less than three months; John Hooker after five months; and superseding but not replacing George Meade within nine months. When John Charles Fremont, the Republicans' presidential candidate in 1856, proved to be an inept military commander before resigning his command over a dispute about seniority, Lincoln allowed him to remain "awaiting orders" for the rest of the war although the Pathfinder still enjoyed substantial political connections.

And although Lincoln appointed several political generals he also fired a number of them when their military liabilities outweighed their political benefits. Paradoxically even though Lincoln had slight personal relationship with his generals he almost always sided with his generals against criticism from civilian second-guessers, described by Archer Jones as sometimes "belligerent, almost blood-thirsty." Again quoting Jones, Lincoln supported "them in acting according to what history, their war experience and their respect for their adversary taught them was a realistic logistic strategy."

Another example of Lincoln's ruthless nature: In a rare instance of venting his frustration toward the soft war advocates who had command or other important staff positions, Lincoln angrily, and on the spot, cashiered a War Department staff officer who was also the brother of George McClellan's chief of staff. The offending officer, Major John Key, had stated in private conversation that Lee's army had not been "bagged" after retreating from Antietam because that was "not in the game." When confronted directly by Lincoln, Key admitted that he'd said "The object is that neither army shall get much advantage of the other; that both shall be kept in the field till they are exhausted, when we will make a compromise and save slavery."

After Key made an appeal to Lincoln to reconsider, Lincoln, in his letter rejecting such appeal, advised Key:

... I had been brought to fear that there was a class of officers in the army ..., who were playing a game to not beat the enemy when they could, on some peculiar notion as to the proper way of saving the Union; and when you were proved to me, in your own presence, to have avowed yourself in favor of that 'game,' and did not attempt

to controvert the proof, I dismissed you as an example and a warning (Emphasis added).

Other than regularly failing to find commanders who were satisfactory to him, Lincoln made other mistakes, especially during his first two years in office. One of his most serious mistakes occurred when he and Stanton tried to manage the defense against Stonewall Jackson's Shenandoah Valley campaign in 1862. To be fair, Jackson's campaign is still generally regarded as one of the most brilliant military campaigns in American history, and to be more fair Lincoln's generals were only borderline competent. But the biggest problem was that three Federal corps were operating more or less independently when the situation cried out for an unified command. After Jackson had almost totally flummoxed the Federals Lincoln and Stanton realized the error of their ways to appoint John Pope to command a new army, the Army of Virginia, consisting of the remnants of the three corps that had fared so miserably against Jackson. Pope, a favorite of the Radical Republicans in Congress, also proved to be as inept as most of the rest of the Eastern generals and was soon replaced by McClellan, who, although winning a narrow tactical victory at Antietam, was soon fired for failing to aggressively pursue Lee.

Lincoln seldom involved himself at the tactical level but on one occasion was present for an attack that resulted in the capture of Norfolk. He kept abreast of, even participated in, strategic matters, for instance being part of a hastily called conference before approving the massive shifting of troops to Chickamauga after the defeat at Chickamauga. As the only President to hold a patent, Lincoln liked to stay abreast of developments in new weapons, other hardware and gadgets. After test firing a new repeating rifle (in the backyard of the White House, if you can imagine that!) he personally forced the army to start purchasing these new rifles and carbines, resulting in a manifest advantage to Federal cavalry in the latter stages of the war. To stay abreast of battlefield developments Lincoln would practically live in the telegraph office while battles were ongoing. Lincoln frequently visited the Eastern fronts, for instance remaining in the vicinity of the Richmond/Petersburg area for approximately two weeks during the final portion of the war.

His Emancipation Proclamation became one of Lincoln's most significant contribution to the Federal effort. Because Lincoln's proclamation had far reaching civil rights ramifications it is easy to overlook the fact that it was primarily a military measure intended to strengthen Federal manpower

while at the same time weakening Southern resources. Lincoln used his authority as commander in chief, incidentally over the initial reservations if not objection of his cabinet. By the end of the war Blacks soldiers comprised ten percent of the Federal army, contributing heavily at the battles of Nashville, Fort Fisher, and Appomattox. On the other hand, because Lincoln recognized the Constitutional limitations of his authority as Commander in Chief he heavily and successfully lobbied for the enactment of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution.

In contrast to Davis' poor relationships with a variety of governmental and high ranking military personnel, Lincoln became respected, if not admired, by almost all of his cabinet, Salmon Chase, the Treasury Secretary, probably being the most notable exception. In a typically clever political move, Lincoln surprisingly accepted Chase's resignation before nominating him to become Chief Justice replacing the deceased Roger Taney. While Lincoln had his detractors among some Radical Republicans in Congress, for the most part he held the devotion of those who mattered, including especially Seward, Stanton, Grant, and others throughout the high command.

Conclusion

For the past several decades the strong consensus among historians rates Lincoln as the best president in our nation's history. It's akin to comparing apples to oranges, especially since no other American ever served under the same conditions as did Davis -- but we cannot imagine Davis' ranking as being anywhere higher than somewhere in the lower middle had he ever served as president of the United States. He certainly was not a complete bust as Confederate president and his prior accomplishments as the Union Secretary of War would suggest that he would have been at least the equal of many of the mediocre men who served as president in the 19th Century. But unlike the truly great leaders in our nation's history Davis lacked any vision for a national future, instead being devoted almost entirely to trying to protect and preserve a beleaguered sectional heritage.

Obviously their respective circumstances as commanders-in-chief were vastly different, but on balance Lincoln was also clearly the superior commander-in-chief. Lincoln struck the better balance required of a commander-in-chief to set national objectives before finding deputies and other subordinates the means to accomplish such objectives than did Davis. Lincoln's resolute determination coupled with deft political leadership helped

to hold the Union together; in contrast Davis' failure to assess the precarious state of the Confederacy together with his rigid, even spiteful relationship with a wide range of Confederate civilian and military officials did little to stem the Confederacy's collapse. Too often the Confederates' strategies were not based on such practical considerations as military capabilities, relative combat power, logistical support, transportation, and the like, but rather by self-delusion.

There were myriad reasons, structural and operational, why the Confederacy did not win the Civil War. For all his faults, Davis did not cause the South to lose; neither did he do much to help it win.

One plausible comparison:

Lincoln was flexible; Davis was rigid. Lincoln wanted to win; Davis wanted to be right. Lincoln had a broad strategic vision of Union goals; Davis could never enlarge his narrow view. Lincoln searched for the right generals, then let them fight. Davis continuously played favorites and interfered unduly with his generals, even with Robert E. Lee. Lincoln led his nation; Davis failed to rally the South.

Lincoln's status as the superior commander-in-chief is undoubtedly buttressed by the fact that the Union prevailed for some reasons, for instance greater manpower and industrial strength, that had little to do with Lincoln's abilities, including his leadership. But this disregards Lincoln's many contributions such as immediately initiating a naval blockade that eventually sapped the Rebel strength, never settling for mediocrity from his key generals, appointing and retaining cabinet members who were united in a common cause, insisting on a grand strategy of destroying the enemy's armies, and assuring his armies were well fed, armed and equipped. Nevertheless after more than three years of fighting Lincoln's re-election still was not certain and that the Federal effort would continue to be sustained if McClellan won the election. But news of Admiral Farragut's victory at Mobile Bay, Sherman's capture of Atlanta, Sheridan pushing Early's army up the Shenandoah Valley, helped to assure Lincoln's re-election with the continuation of a vigorous prosecution of the war.

Heads of nations and their armies probably receive too much blame whenever they lose and too much credit whenever they win but the fact is that

leadership is an indisputable factor in the results of any conflict, and without doubt Lincoln's leadership was the far more meaningful. Despite some differences among them his team of cabinet members and military commanders believed in his leadership; they shared and were devoted to the same objectives as did Lincoln. Moreover Lincoln made tangible, positive contributions such as manpower gains from his Emancipation Proclamation, superior firepower from the repeating carbines that the army had once resisted, and a better strategy based upon Lincoln's insistence upon decisive victories instead of the traditional soft war philosophies. Perhaps in other situations Davis might have been an adequate commander in chief but during our nations' Civil War he was no match for Lincoln's genius.

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