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THE LIFE AND CAREER

OF

EDWIN McMASTERS STANTON

(TITLE)

BY

MARY LOUISE PRICE

PLAN B PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS PLAN B PAPER BE ACCEPTED AS
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INTRODUCTION

Few men in American history have displayed such divergent behavior as Edwin McMasters Stanton, who has been called an unselfish patriot, the greatest war minister the government has known; on the other hand, his fellow cabinet member, Navy Secretary Welles expressed contempt for his character and distrust for his every action. Otto Eisenschiml even suggests that Stanton may have had a hand in the plot which ultimately culminated in Lincoln's assassination.¹ Attorney General Black thought him an "apostate, renegade, a betrayer of country, a crawling sycophant".² Lorenzo Thomas said, "Stanton is an enigma to me. He has no manners and treats persons rudely, and yet at times he appears kind."³ George Templeman Strong said, "Lincoln's right-hand man combined good and evil. He was honest, patriotic, indefatigable, warm-hearted, unselfish as well as arbitrary, capricious, tyrannical, vindictive."⁴

¹ Otto Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Co., 1937).

² Burton Jesse Hendrick, Lincoln's War Cabinet, (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Co., 1946), 237.

³ Ibid., Lorenzo Thomas, Union General, replaced Stanton as Secretary of War on February 21, 1868.

⁴ Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 362.

There were people who liked Stanton for his efficiency, for his work, without caring much about him personally; and there were also people who liked him personally without relation to this work. Few remained neutral in their appraisal of the man.

It is my intention within this paper to conduct an unbiased study of my own into the controversial behavior and personality exhibited in the life of Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin McMasters Stanton.

PART I: PREWAR CAREER

Edwin M. Stanton was born December 19, 1814, in the small town of Steubenville, Ohio. His heredity contained a long family history of strong-mindedness or obstinacy. From his environment as well, Stanton received a mandate to "regard himself a competent judge in personal equity, ready to back up his judgments by walking out on the show if necessary".⁵

Very early, Stanton was introduced to the slavery issue. Abolitionist Benjamin Lundy frequently received shelter and financial support from the Stantons. Edwin later recalled the discussions held. His father, a physician, refused to use medicines produced by slave labor and asked his son to swear enmity to the institution. Young Stanton, however, chose to emulate a future law partner, Judge Tappan, whose dislike for slavery being less than his distrust of agitators, preferred keeping silent on the subject.

Edwin's education began in Miss Randle's kindergarten and was followed by Henry Orr's Seminary around the block. At the age of ten, he entered George Buchanan's Latin School where he was termed "an imperious and self-reliant young man".⁶ His father's death two years

⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁶ Fletcher Pratt, Stanton: Lincoln's Secretary of War, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1953), 4.

later forced a postponement of his education. He accepted a position as a clerk in James Turnbull's book store where he read every book and developed a critical taste in literature. Isolated from his peers, he spent much time dreaming of future material success. He learned that man must scramble in order to get a share of riches.

Stanton's health had never been good from infancy. During his early teen years, he developed violent attacks of asthma which became a permanent feature of his life. Only by intense drive did he continue to live and work. Three years in the bookshop convinced Edwin that, in view of his health, the quickest way to the things he wanted was through education.

April, 1831, sixteen-year-old Stanton enrolled in Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio. He was financed by his guardian, Daniel L. Collier. Even though his father had wished him to be a doctor, he chose law. It was first at Kenyon he encountered politics and the forces that were to furnish his reason for existence.

The religious revival of the early 1800's had always influenced Stanton. Despite the fact his parents were ardent Methodists, he became an Episcopalian less than six months after arriving at Kenyon. He was determined that no dogma would be forced upon him.

Late in September, 1832, due to financial reverses, Stanton again left school to manage Turnbull's store in Columbus, Ohio. He wrote home that "he was becoming acquainted with the proper methods

of doing business, learning how to cheat and avoid being cheated."⁷ He longed to return to Kenyon, but was persuaded to study law with Collier at Steubenville instead. In August, 1835, he passed the bar exam with honors but was not permitted to practice for another year since he was under age.

Five days before his twenty-second birthday, he married Mary Lamson of Columbus, Ohio. His "reprehensible qualities were repressed by her presence"⁸, and they were very happy together. He began a law practice of his own in Cadiz, Ohio. Stanton was a "young man with a passionate intensity of feeling, formidable will to success, an almost frightening capacity to support ambition with toil."⁹ At the age of twenty-two, he was elected prosecuting attorney for Harrison County.

Two reasons are cited for his outstanding success:

1. prodigious preparation
2. his ability to begin a line of argument with broad, universal principles; leading step by logical step to specific application, so producing a structure that stood firm, not only in the case he was handling, but as a controlling precedent in all others of similar type."¹⁰

After his reputation became known, it was impossible to get weak or

⁷Ibid., 13.

⁸Ibid., 20.

⁹Pratt, op. cit., 24.

¹⁰Ibid., 58.

crooked witnesses to take the stand against him. His was a lightening fast, closely applied mind, utterly devoted to the cause. He practiced rudeness to those he considered inferior in his profession.

The Stantons returned to Steubenville in 1840, settled their debts with Collier and continued a thriving law practice. Determined to have financial security, the young lawyer took on three other partnerships in nearby towns. A daughter arrived soon. Little Lucy became ill and died. Her father temporarily abandoned his practice. A son was born in 1842. Then in 1844, his wife died during childbirth. His grief bordered upon insanity. Now that material security was a reality, fate had denied the privilege of enjoyment. Close friends felt his brusqueness was an act designed to preserve himself against new personal hurts. Again tragedy struck in 1846, when his brother, Darwin, whom he had financed through Harvard medical school, committed suicide. Stanton was described as a man "who had plunged into sudden pessimism so deep as to resemble abject panic".¹¹

On a trip to Columbus, Ohio, in 1842, he became acquainted with Salmon P. Chase who sought Stanton as an active participant in the anti-slavery movement. Neither man was able to convince the other, but they became close friends.

¹¹Bruce Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1951), 99.

Stanton had become convinced that one could not succeed both as lawyer and as politician at the same time. His defense of cotton mill owners against labor on a charge of conspiracy and their subsequent acquittal, brought him intense unpopularity. Also his work on so many slave cases had earned him the title, "attorney general for runaway slaves".¹² He would not risk professional advancement because "Ed Stanton was a young man on the way up, and he was determined that nothing should stand in his way."¹³ Thus, when Chase seized the opportunity offered by Stanton's desperate loneliness to gain his support for the Free Soil Party, he was disappointed. He accused his friend of cowardice and hypocrisy. "Edwin Stanton played both ends against the middle when he had to, and he played the game to win."¹⁴

For several obvious reasons, he moved from Ohio to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1849. His success in numerous cases such as the Wheeling Bridge Case¹⁵ earned him the invitation to join with some of the country's ablest patent attorneys in the McCormick Case. It was during this trial in Cincinnati, that Stanton met Abraham Lincoln for the first time. He greeted the Illinoisan's appearance with "Where did

¹²Thomas and Hyman, op. cit., 30.

¹³Ibid., 22.

¹⁴Ibid., 48.

¹⁵The Wheeling Bridge Case established the right of the Supreme Court to rule in an equity action. Stanton was given the credit.

that long-armed baboon come from? If that giraffe appears in the case, I will throw up my brief and leave."¹⁶ Stanton won out; Lincoln was given a background paperwork assignment.

Certainly, the success Stanton had achieved in the law and the comfortable income this was bringing failed to lift his spirits. Without someone to love, success lacked meaning. He began thinking of a second marriage. Following a stormy courtship, he married Ellen Hutchison, thirteen years his junior, on June 25, 1856. As a wife, she brought cheer, social charm, and an element of common sense that had been lacking in Stanton's life.

Perhaps the most important case Stanton ever attempted was the Limantour Case in California. For several years a gang of Mexicans had been stealing from the United States Government by false land grants at a rate of millions a year. At the request of Attorney General Black, he collected a four hundred folio volume of evidence containing a complete record of every land grant either government had made. It was the most crushing of all Stanton presentations, and for this, he received \$25,000 plus expenses. More importantly, he came to the attention of President Buchanan.

On December 20, 1860, at the age of forty six, he was suddenly appointed Attorney General of the United States. Stanton was not eager for the job as it meant a considerable financial sacrifice. The reason

¹⁶Pratt, op. cit., 61.

he took the position could have been patriotic in that he hoped to alter Buchanan's policies, but more than likely, it was to further his reputation with a brief tenure as the country's highest legal officer.

With the secession of South Carolina, the capital became "nothing but political confusion, turmoil, and anxiety".¹⁷ Buchanan seemingly did nothing about anything. He refused to listen to strong proposals from cabinet members. There was fear of an attempt to seize Washington. Stanton decided something must be done and began to work behind the President's back. A committee began investigating public officials suspected of treason. Lines were kept open to leaders of Congress such as Seward. The Attorney General even discussed a basis for impeachment proceedings but failed. Stanton deserves a large measure of the credit for whatever gains the Union cause made regardless of his methods.

A decade later, the ethicality of his action was questioned. To learn of a plot to overthrow the government, "Stanton would have posed as the devil himself."¹⁸ Black declared in amazement; "Surely, if these things are true, he was the most marvellous impostor who ever lived or died."¹⁹

¹⁷ Thomas and Hyman, op. cit., 86.

¹⁸ Ibid., 116.

¹⁹ Ibid., 114.

On the ethicality of Stanton's actions, see Richard F. Fenno, Jr., The President's Cabinet, (Cambridge, 1959), 139.

In the election of 1860, Stanton secretly favored Breckinridge but firmly believed Lincoln would be elected. He lacked faith in Lincoln's ability to improve the situation even if the nation held together until he took office.

Stanton was quite vindictive in his description of the beginning days of Lincoln's administration.

"Bluster and bravado alternates with timidity and despair. . . Recklessness and helplessness by turns rule the hour. What but disgrace and disaster can happen?"²⁰

Yet his final evaluation of the situation was much more optimistic.

"I do not believe this government can be overthrown. . . It may be overrun for a brief period but cannot be destroyed."²¹

²⁰Thomas and Hyman, op. cit., 120.

²¹Ibid., 92.

PART II: WAR CAREER

Much inefficiency gripped the War Department in the early days of the war. Ambiguity in office procedure meant opportunity for graft; bureaucracy, binding the bookkeeping system, produced emergencies; meanwhile, field commanders were independent of civilian control.

Stanton remained in the capital after the new cabinet had assumed control. He was unknown, however, until his role in the Trent Affair again placed him in the nation's spotlight. He became increasingly outspoken in his criticism of Secretary Cameron's administration.

At the same time, Mr. Stanton was posing as unofficial legal counselor to General McCellan. The author feels he was angling for Radical support to get into the cabinet by informing against McCellan and at the same time posing as the commander's faithful friend.

Lincoln had loyally supported Cameron even though he felt the Secretary should resign. Oddly enough, Stanton furnished the statement which led to his dismissal. The suggested use of Negro troops came from Edwin Stanton, and it was presented to the press in advance of presidential knowledge. Lincoln retracted the offending statement and sent Cameron to Russia. That Stanton should have succeeded to the post presents one of the most ironic episodes in Lincoln's career.

Knowing Stanton's impetuous ambition and unscrupulous methods in attaining ends, suspicion naturally arises that in encouraging Cameron to pursue a course which would end his cabinet career, Stanton was not inspired exclusively by patriotic motives.

"He never exhibited more brilliantly his gift for being all things to all people than when he rode into the War Department with the backing of a number of discordant groups each of which believed that it had put a representative in the cabinet."²²

When asked what he intended to do, Stanton replied:

"I intend to accomplish three things. I will make Abe Lincoln President of the United States. I will force this man McClellan to fight or throw up; and last but not least, I will pick Lorenzo Thomas up with a pair of tongs and drop him from the nearest window."²³

The question of why Lincoln appointed this man to one of the top posts in the government is often asked. The answer could be found in his devotion to the Union as exhibited in the Buchanan cabinet. Most of all, Lincoln admired his competence. He may have expected Stanton to be difficult to handle, but so were others of his cabinet.

Never since Valley Forge had the destiny of America been so dependent upon military power. In the last analysis, its fate was dependent upon the ingenuity, skill, and determination of the President and War Secretary in finding leaders, manpower, and materials for battle fronts while maintaining unity on the home front.

²²T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and the Radicals, (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1941), 90.

²³Pratt, op. cit., 133.

Even those who distrusted Stanton in 1862, and hated him later, had to admit his methods, personality, and energy were what the Union needed in those dark days and that he did not spare himself.

He immediately set to work cleaning up the dilapidated War Department Building. All offices were concentrated in one place. Procedures were systemitized; policies were altered. Working like a man driven, Stanton expected the same dedicated performance from his office staff which toiled until midnight or later. The Secretary collapsed from exhaustion less than one month after taking over, but was back in four days. He rarely felt he had the right to relaxation.

Overwork did not sweeten his temperament. A critic claimed Stanton loved to exercise power, took pleasure in being ungracious and rough towards those who were under his control. Clerks dreaded the calm following the explosions because of the sudden contrast. Though he rarely apologized directly, he seldom failed to express appreciation for the smallest favors.

Congress, at Stanton's suggestion, passed a Railroad Bill authorizing the President to assume control, achieve a rate formula, standardize track gauges, establish freight car utilization procedures and improve signaling systems. Company heads were given a chance to assume these duties; in the event they failed, Stanton exercised the dictatorial powers granted the President by Congress.

New controls were placed on purchasing. These required all firms and persons to validate contracts in legal form or have them cancelled. An investigating committee audited and adjusted all contracts, orders, and claims in the files relating to arms, ammunition and ordnance. Defective arms and clothing were returned to the manufacturers without payment. Contractors were made subject to martial law and were liable to court-martial if indicted for fraud.

Internal Security was taken over from the State Department. Most civilian prisoners being held on no great charge were released. This made Stanton quite popular, but he soon lost his reputation as a gentle reformer as northern prisons again filled with civilians. Many of these were proven guilty; others suffered because of the Secretary's impetuosity.

Stanton found Congressional allies in the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. Through the power of subpoena, they could elicit information that he could not obtain himself. They could challenge unfitness, uncover fraud, and keep an eye upon the military. This group was used at times to air personal grudges. Years were required to prove innocence; reputations were stained for life.

The telegraph was placed under constant government control. Even though Stanton moved the telegraph office next to his office in the War Department Building, he was never able fully to control the military

as he wished. There was a constant disagreement between the generals and civilian chiefs over its use.

Prior to this time, recruiting service had been mostly within state control. Now attempts were made to center them more directly in the War Department. Whole regiments, recruited by individuals who commanded them, had been accepted. This practice had led to some deplorable results and soon after taking office, Stanton stopped it. His efforts to take army appointments out of politics brought vociferous complaints. Draft substitution also was condemned by Stanton who termed it, "rich man's money for poor man's blood". As time went on, it became evident to Lincoln and Stanton that volunteering and drafting by states would not furnish sufficient manpower. They were persuaded at the risk of offending border states, to use Negro troops from occupied Dixie in preference to a federal draft.

"Stanton appreciated to the full the vast importance of the press as a medium for shaping mass opinion."²⁴ He employed or directed a host of agents who wrote articles and talked editors into publishing Radical propaganda. "This was one of the principal weapons employed by the Jacobin machine in its drive to force its program upon the nation, and Stanton acted as the chief agency for its dissemination."²⁵ Pamphlet writers formed the essential part of his campaign.

²⁴Williams, op. cit., 232.

²⁵Ibid., 232.

The press remained hostile to Stanton all during the war. Even though he ordered any newspaper publishing military information "not expressly authorized by the War Department should be deprived of the privilege of receiving news reports by telegraph and shipping copies by rail,"²⁶ he abandoned any hope of being able to control the Associated Press. Instead, he concentrated on smaller papers; advertising was thrown their way to help them financially.

Nothing was allowed to become public which would endanger home-front morale. Two newspaper editors were arrested, their offices were closed down, papers were burned for printing a fake proclamation from Lincoln. The refusal of the telegraph company to open their books brought arrest of employees in all cities. Two men in minor positions had hoped to make a fortune on the stock market by publishing the adverse news. These were placed in Ft. Lafayette, and all others were released. Stanton even acted against friends if necessary.

It was a time of personal tragedy, the death of his infant son, the press chose for its most powerful attack. Stanton was sick with grief and fatigue. His attitude can be seen in a letter which he wrote to his friend, Nahum Capen.

"No public man in times like these can fail to have both his words and acts misunderstood. My official position was not sought for; it is held at great personal sacrifice, and aspiring to nothing beyond, having a heart single to the one great object of overcoming the rebellion and restoring the authority of the government in time to save

²⁶ Thomas and Hyman, op. cit., 176.

the nation from the horrible gulf of bankruptcy. . . I am content to bear admonition and reproof for any real or supposed errors with humble submission."²⁷

Stanton's sternness toward favor seekers so impressed everyone that John Hay, one of Lincoln's secretaries, felt it preferable "to make a tour of a smallpox hospital rather than ask a specific favor from Stanton".²⁸

Desertion became one of Stanton's major headaches. He felt that bounty jumping must be dealt with harshly. Deserters and others guilty of breaking the regulations were severely punished whenever he had his way, but Lincoln often intervened. Stanton grumbled that the President was imperiling discipline.

The Secretary's biggest mistake lay in his determination to be infallible in every department of the war. Feeling a need for military advice, he called in a retired professional soldier, Hitchcock. He spent many hours learning military history, strategy, etc. He attempted to organize the Army's bureau chiefs into a kind of general staff but found that modern concepts of administrative uniformity did not apply to the Civil War.

"Responsibilities of generals to the President and Secretary of War were ambiguous and exceedingly flexible. Scorn for the civilian Secretary had been a fixture of professional martial mores for seventy years, and Stanton's driving energy had not yet eradicated that attitude."²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 142.

²⁸ Ibid., 166.

²⁹ Ibid., 241.

His order, "to move or be removed", many times fell on deaf ears.

The relations between himself and General McClellan would illustrate the above. Many times Stanton took it upon himself to withdraw troops from McClellan's Peninsular Campaign. He constantly interfered with military strategy. General McClellan did not choose to bow to the wishes of the Secretary; therefore, he became the target of vindictive attack. Hitchcock later recalled,

"Stanton stated many facts to show the astonishing incompetency of General McClellan. I can't recite them, but the Secretary stated fact after fact until I felt positively sick."³⁰

McClellan considered Stanton inexperienced, incompetent, and perhaps untrustworthy. Though demoted once, he rose again. In a letter to his wife, the General described Stanton as:

"the most unmitigated scoundrel I ever knew, heard or read of; if Stanton had lived during Jesus' lifetime, Judas would have remained a respected member of the fraternity of Apostles and would have been shocked at Stanton. I may do the man an injustice. . . God grant that I may be wrong, for I hate to think that humanity can sink that low."³¹

The Union high command was in a perilous state with two such suspicious, sensitive individuals obliged to work with each other.

Stanton has been accused of playing with and against Lincoln on his reconstruction policies. In 1863, he was quick to recognize the potency of Lincoln's plan as a war weapon. Even though its terms repelled

³⁰Williams, op. cit., 125.

³¹Thomas and Hyman, op. cit., 209.

many Northerners, they worked to eliminate the Southern will to fight. In 1864, Stanton again seems to be fostering the Radical Wade-Davis Bill. He simply felt that reconstruction properly should be handled by the controlling powers of Congress. In reality, he disregarded laws he did not wish to enforce.

Stanton was a master at playing all sides in politics. Someone has said,

"Stanton changed political colors with the rapidity of a Cameleon--now glowing a radical pink, next instant, a conservative brown. . . He must at times have seemed to flash like a prism with all of the colors of the spectrum."³²

He secretly provided information from the Department files so that Republican senators could launch smear campaigns. Whenever the outcome seemed uncertain, furloughs were granted so that troops from doubtful states could go home and vote. In Maryland, provost marshals guarded the polls and forced prospective voters to take a state-drawn test oath. The Republicans had a decided advantage. To Stanton, the Democratic organization was permanently tainted with treason. He resented its criticism on his plans for internal security, conscription, emancipation, and Negro enlistment. It is rather surprising in that he began his career as a Democrat.

As tension mounted in the Wilderness Campaign, the strain on nerves became intense. Stanton developed a noticeable tremor. With

³²Williams, op. cit., 91.

the fall of Richmond, Dr. Reid, a friend from Ohio, recalled that "Stanton had his iron mask torn off, and was trotting about in exhilarated joy."³³ The dome of the capitol was illuminated in jets of flame with the inscription, "The Union It Must and Shall Be Preserved."³⁴

A few days before Lee's surrender, Stanton went to Lincoln telling him that his work was finished and asking to be relieved of his burden. Putting his hands on Stanton's shoulders and with tears in his eyes, Lincoln said,

"Stanton, you cannot go. Reconstruction is more difficult and dangerous than construction and destruction. You have been my main reliance; you must help us through the final act. The bag is filled. It must be tied and tied securely. Some knots slip; yours do not. You understand the situation better than anyone else, and it is my wish and the country's that you remain."³⁵

The Stantons were at home when a messenger brought the news of Lincoln's assassination. He reported seeing a conspirator attempting to enter the Stanton house about the same hour fixed for the assault on Lincoln and Seward. Despite warning, he immediately went to the house where Lincoln lay dying. It was fortunate that Stanton was present in Washington at this time for "he more than any other brought order out

³³ Clarence McCartney, Lincoln and His Cabinet, (N. Y.: C. Scribner's Sons, 1931), 357.

³⁴ Thomas and Hyman, op. cit., 352.

³⁵ McCartney, op. cit., 343.

of chaos, confidence out of terror, and steadied the pulse of the nation."³⁶

The Secretary took charge of the following:

- "1. giving orders to the military authority of the District of Columbia
2. notifying Vice-President Johnson that Lincoln was dying
3. notifying Chief Justice Chase to be ready to administer of the oath of office to the Vice-President
4. informing the public of the shooting
5. sending for Grant"³⁷

When Lee's army surrendered, Stanton had the dome of the Capitol illuminated by a transparency bearing the words of the one hundred eighteenth Psalm: "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." Thus ended the war career of Edwin M. Stanton.

It is impossible to form a true picture of his actions and compulsions unless one is aware of the material he had to work with. He was constantly required to make snap decisions which would have far-reaching effects. He has been compared to a ringmaster of a three ring circus.

At least part of the credit is Stanton's for waking up the government as to the nature, scope and cost of the war it was waging.

³⁶ Ibid., 350.

³⁷ Ibid., 351.

"With all his blind spots, he administered the office with commendable efficiency. Method, system, and irresistible driving energy characterized his performance. Impulse, prejudice, and reluctance to admit error marred it."³⁸

³⁸Thomas and Hyman, op. cit., 377.

PART THREE: POSTWAR CAREER

Following Lincoln's death, Stanton was in virtual control of the government. The President had just been sworn in and lacked self-confidence; Congress was not in session. Stanton had charge of the Army and with the excitement of the assassination, he could justify almost any action he might want to take. Some authorities feel civilian control was on the brink of extinction, and Stanton was tempted to set up a military dictatorship temporarily.

Congressional leaders and Cabinet members were called to Stanton's office to hear the plans made before Lincoln's death for occupation of the Southern states. They agreed in essence but felt something had to be done concerning the Negro's right to vote. They also agreed that nothing concerning the dead President should be exploited commercially. Ford's Theatre was ordered closed. No photographs were to be taken. Stanton was determined that nothing connected with the murder should serve to glorify the deed.

Grant rushed to the capital with news of General Sherman's truce with the South. This could threaten the entire peace. There are conflicting ideas concerning the motives behind the move. Stanton felt he was using this as a future step toward the presidency. Led by Sherman, the South might rise again. Strong measures were taken to

discipline Sherman. Nine reasons for the action were given to the press without the general's knowledge. Sherman was deeply hurt. Williams says,

"Stanton wanted to smear Sherman and destroy his reputation, and success depended upon his ability to distort the general's actions and motives in the press accounts of the affair. The Secretary sent false stories to the papers. He deleted items which could have cleared the general."³⁹

Stanton got all of the blame for the way Sherman was treated. Johnson had secretly agreed but let the load fall on Stanton's shoulders. More was involved than either man's personal feeling. It tied in with their differences over policy, with the question of what attitude the government should take toward the conquered South and the rights that should be accorded to the Negro.

Stanton released hordes of government agents throughout the area in search of Lincoln's assassins. These arrested everyone in the Surratt boardinghouse. Later three suspects were arrested elsewhere. They were placed, at Stanton's orders, below deck on the monitors, Montauk and Saugus. Each prisoner had an iron ball attached to his leg by a heavy chain and wore handcuffs joined by an iron bar. For even better security, Stanton ordered a canvas bag placed over each head and tied around the neck. A hole in the device allowed the prisoners to breathe and eat, but they were unable to see. Physicians, fearing

³⁹Williams, op. cit., 234.

insanity from the summer heat, asked Stanton to remove the hoods. Stanton promised to have them removed, to allow the prisoners to exercise daily and to provide them with reading matter. None of these promises were kept. Booth's body was taken on board the Nontauk for positive identification. He was then buried under a brick floor under the Washington arsenal without ceremony. A \$100,000 reward was offered for Jefferson Davis also as he was believed to be a part of the plot. This, of course, was erroneous.

Even though a military trial was unconstitutional, it was used under "the common law of war". Stanton had no personal connection with the trial except the cross-examination of Weichmann. In spite of circumstantial evidence, all were pronounced guilty and were sentenced to hang. The President thought of commuting Mrs. Surratt's sentence but was dissuaded by Stanton.

Now that Lincoln's assassins had been brought to justice, Stanton again contemplated resigning from the Cabinet. President Johnson requested him to continue for the present. Much still remained to be done. There was the question of speed in returning the enlisted volunteers to civilian. The demobilization was achieved so smoothly that it surprised many contemporaries. The army had to be reorganized into two groups, each with its own purpose: Indian trouble in the West and the occupation of the South. Through military occupation of the South, stability could be brought to the war-torn area quickly.

After only six months of the Johnson administration, Congress and the Cabinet were at odds with the President. Andrew Johnson lacked Lincoln's temperament, sensitive tact, statesmanship, and stature. Stanton worried most over Johnson's inconsistencies and concluded that he was "trying to ride two horses and he probably means to join the party which finally wins."⁴⁰ The vote of the black man in the South would make the difference.

The President was accused of making moderates into Radicals by opposing everything Congress proposed. Stanton's Serenade Speech was construed by Johnson supporters as backing the President. Really the Secretary was insisting on compromise. When approached on the press release, he said, "I am for the Johnson we nominated and elected, not the apostate who is now in sympathy with traitors."⁴¹

President Johnson tried to force a showdown in his Cabinet. There were two reasons why he did not ask Stanton to resign. He was hoping the Maddox suit⁴² would ruin him, and the Congressional elections were coming in 1866. Stanton wrote his letter of resignation. "He would have walked out of the Cabinet into the pages of history, a hero

⁴⁰Thomas and Hyman, op. cit., 456.

⁴¹Ibid., 481.

⁴²The Maddox suit involved a \$30,000 claim for war arrests on false charges of disloyalty, financed by Presidential supporters to break Stanton.

in the sight of most countrymen, and a man whose honor showed only minor blemishes"⁴³, but he never sent the letter.

Reports from the South revealed the inadequacy of the Lincoln plans for postwar reconstruction. One from Louisiana said:

"The entire civil government is a vast scheme of fraud enforced by military rule, by means of which, a few political tricksters have taken the reins of government into their own hands."⁴⁴

Stronger measures needed to be adopted. Drained financially, Stanton's family pleaded with him to resign and to go into private practice. He decided to remain a while longer in hopes of getting sufficient evidence to try the imprisoned Jefferson Davis.

Congress passed a severe reconstruction bill. Due to his unpopularity, Stanton advised the President not to veto the bill. The President retaliated by asking Stanton to compose his veto message. Congress passed the bill over the veto.

Against Johnson's purges of officeholders, Congress passed the tenure of office bill which said:

"Cabinet officers shall hold their offices . . . during the term of the President by whom they may have been appointed, and for one month thereafter."⁴⁵

Ironically, Stanton advised the President to veto the very bill which would keep him in office later.

⁴³Ibid., 491.

⁴⁴Ibid., 461.

⁴⁵Ibid., 525.

Relations became more and more strained between the War Department and the President. Grant was called to the White House to confer with Johnson and was offered Stanton's position as interim secretary should Stanton be suspended. Grant and Stanton, who had always been friends, became increasingly suspicious of each other. Finally on August 12, 1867, the situation culminated in Stanton's suspension and Grant's appointment. Now, the Secretary faced an uncertain future, with his private fortune gone and his health ruined. Stanton denied the right of the President to suspend him without the Senate's approval. However, he acquiesced, "I have no alternative but to submit, under protest, to superior force."⁴⁶

On January 14, 1868, the Senate ordered Stanton's return to the cabinet. All remained quiet for a few days. Johnson was not to be satisfied until Stanton was out. He brought Sherman to Washington in command of the army. All of these developments were faithfully relayed to Congress by Stanton where they created an uproar. Several leaders advised him to stay. Now with a clear indication that Congress would stand by him, Stanton wrote out an order for the military arrest of Lorenzo Thomas, his successor appointed by President Johnson. It was destroyed. Thomas again refused to obey orders, but this time Stanton used another tactic, whiskey, which seemed much more persuasive.

⁴⁶Ibid., 551.

Stanton determined to remain inside the War Department in order that no other could assume his command. His wife refused to help in any way as she regarded his behavior childish. He remained inside of the barricaded office from February 25, 1868, until May 26, 1868. Two hours after the impeachment vote, he sent his letter of resignation to the White House. However, Townsend delivered the notices as a member of the family might not be welcome. The evening paper, the Washington Intelligencer, pointed out that Johnson had won a double victory.

Stanton tried private practice, but his health would not permit it. His finances were in a difficult state and the family lived on gifts from friends and a partial payment of an old debt.

On December 19, 1868, he was informed of the Senate confirmation of his appointment to the Supreme Court. Stanton was deeply moved for to reach the top of his profession, a seat on the United States Supreme Court, had been his ambition from the earliest days. Ironically, he died four days following Senate confirmation.

CONCLUSION

One must conclude that Edwin M. Stanton was certainly a man of many talents; his was a brilliant intellect. Perhaps no other legal authority in the history of the United States has set more precedents for future generations to follow in courts of law. Apparently he followed a logical, sequential pattern in most of his thinking processes. There is a shrewdness and satirical wit in his decisions. Mere coincidence could not account for the ironical happenings in his career; no happenstance his use of individuals in all areas of life to further his own ambitions. So clever was he in being all things to all people that individuals refused to believe the charges made against him ten years later.

Edwin Stanton possessed tremendous drive and energy. A fanatical concentration upon the task at hand is revealed in every facet of his career. He was willing to labor to the point of exhaustion. Remembering his health problems, one wonders how he managed to survive.

As Secretary of War, he possessed outstanding organizational ability. In only three short months the whole War Department had been reorganized with a simplification of communication, bookkeeping system, office procedure, etc. Fraud and graft were cut as contracts

were examined and goods inspected. Railroads improved their efficiency; the draft helped solve the manpower drain.

As with all men, Stanton is remembered not so much for his strengths and good qualities but for his weaknesses. His reputation has rested mostly upon his postwar career, his quarrels with President Johnson and his questionable behavior in the treatment of prisoners accused of assassinating President Lincoln. His biographers find his motivation an enigma at times.

Least to be admired was his egotistical pride. His disdain for weakness in himself and others is quite evident. He abused those closest to him - his family, friends, and business associates. This arrogance accounts for his zeal to acquire financial security and legal reputation. It accounts for his irritating temperament, gross selfishness, and foul mouth.

Certainly Stanton's was a split personality. His complete dedication to saving the Union at great personal financial sacrifice on one hand and a selfish driving ambition on the other is difficult to comprehend. Great love for his family is expressed by his loneliness during separation and intense grief at their deaths, and yet for years they suffered as he obstinately clung to his position in the War Department. Rationalization cannot wipe the slate clean; yet, of all Lincoln's strong men, the one whom the country could have spared least was the man Edwin McMasters Stanton.

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