

# General George B. McClellan

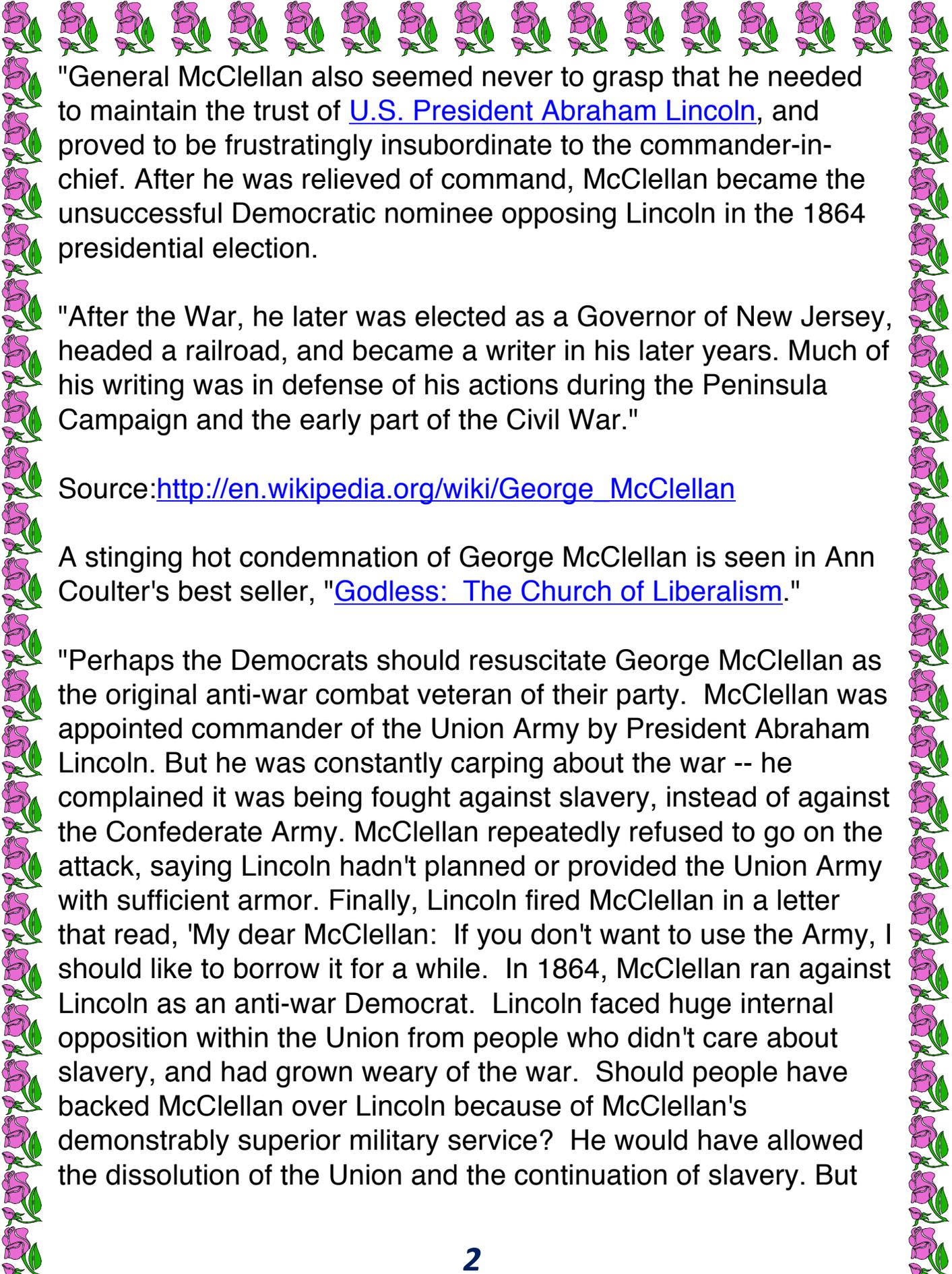
Summarized by D. A. Sharpe

George Brinton McClellan is [my sixth cousin, once removed](#). Our common ancestors are through Plymouth Colony Governor William Bradford and his second wife, Alice Carpenter Southworth Bradford, his sixth great grandparents. They are my seventh great grandparents.

The reader might recall the infamous military character, [Major General George Armstrong Custer](#) of "Custer's Last Stand." Custer was a contradiction in terms. Brilliant in battle though he was (except for his last one), he was last in his class at West Point Academy. He was court martialed for a minor dereliction of duty, but the need for officers was so pressing when the War Between the States broke out, that this infraction was somehow overlooked. He served the North in many brilliant ways, including being an Aide to General George B. McClellan!

Source: "Webster's American Biographies," Charles Van Doren, Editor, Merriam-Webster Inc., Publishers, 1984, pages 245-246

"George Brinton McClellan was a major general (and briefly the general-in-chief of the Union Army on November 5, 1861 - March 11, 1862) during the American War Between the States. Trained at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, he served under [General Winfield Scott](#) in the Mexican War. In 1857, he left the military to work with railroads, but rejoined the U.S. Army in 1861 as the Civil War erupted."



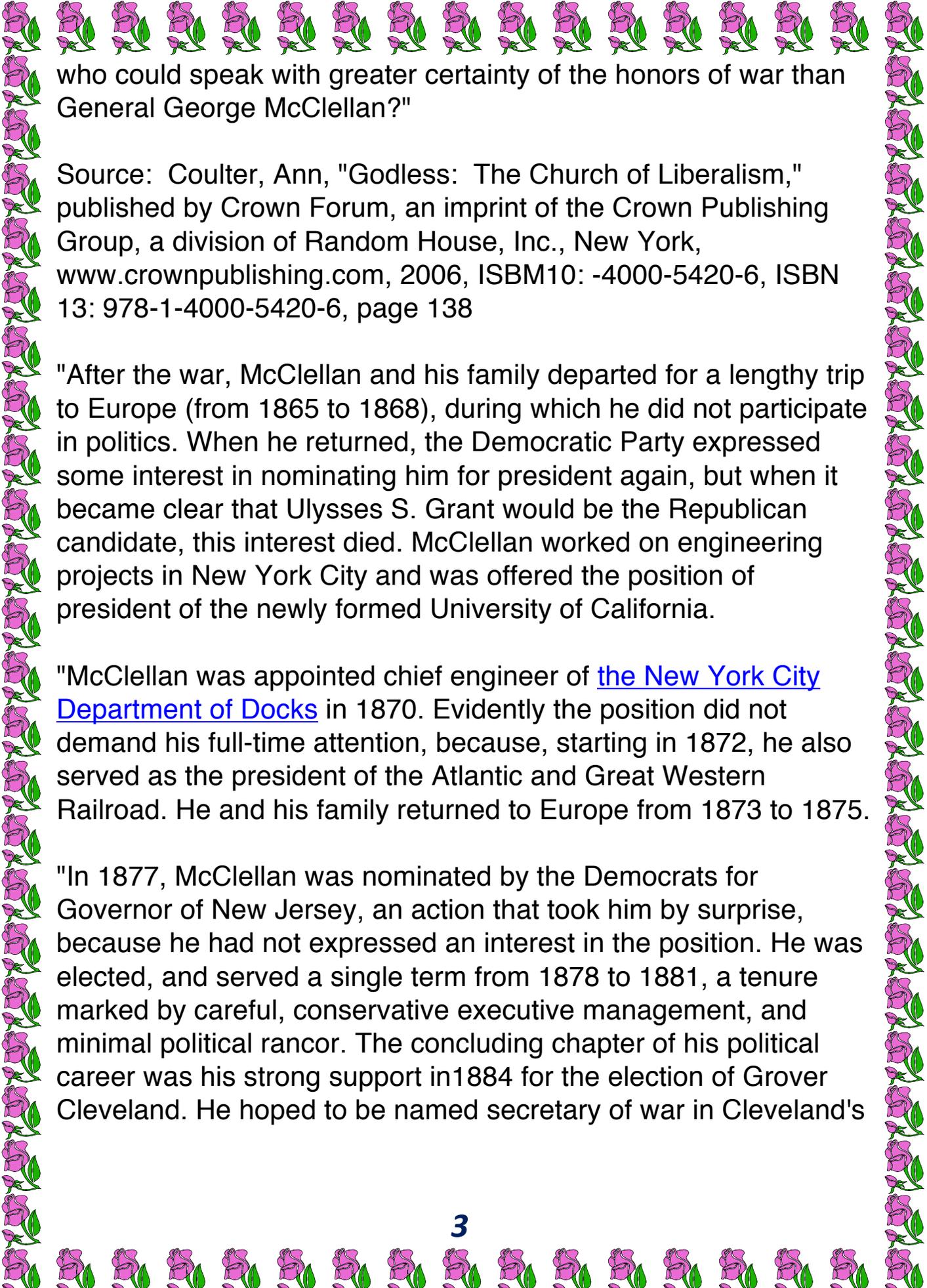
"General McClellan also seemed never to grasp that he needed to maintain the trust of [U.S. President Abraham Lincoln](#), and proved to be frustratingly insubordinate to the commander-in-chief. After he was relieved of command, McClellan became the unsuccessful Democratic nominee opposing Lincoln in the 1864 presidential election.

"After the War, he later was elected as a Governor of New Jersey, headed a railroad, and became a writer in his later years. Much of his writing was in defense of his actions during the Peninsula Campaign and the early part of the Civil War."

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_McClellan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_McClellan)

A stinging hot condemnation of George McClellan is seen in Ann Coulter's best seller, "[Godless: The Church of Liberalism](#)."

"Perhaps the Democrats should resuscitate George McClellan as the original anti-war combat veteran of their party. McClellan was appointed commander of the Union Army by President Abraham Lincoln. But he was constantly carping about the war -- he complained it was being fought against slavery, instead of against the Confederate Army. McClellan repeatedly refused to go on the attack, saying Lincoln hadn't planned or provided the Union Army with sufficient armor. Finally, Lincoln fired McClellan in a letter that read, 'My dear McClellan: If you don't want to use the Army, I should like to borrow it for a while. In 1864, McClellan ran against Lincoln as an anti-war Democrat. Lincoln faced huge internal opposition within the Union from people who didn't care about slavery, and had grown weary of the war. Should people have backed McClellan over Lincoln because of McClellan's demonstrably superior military service? He would have allowed the dissolution of the Union and the continuation of slavery. But



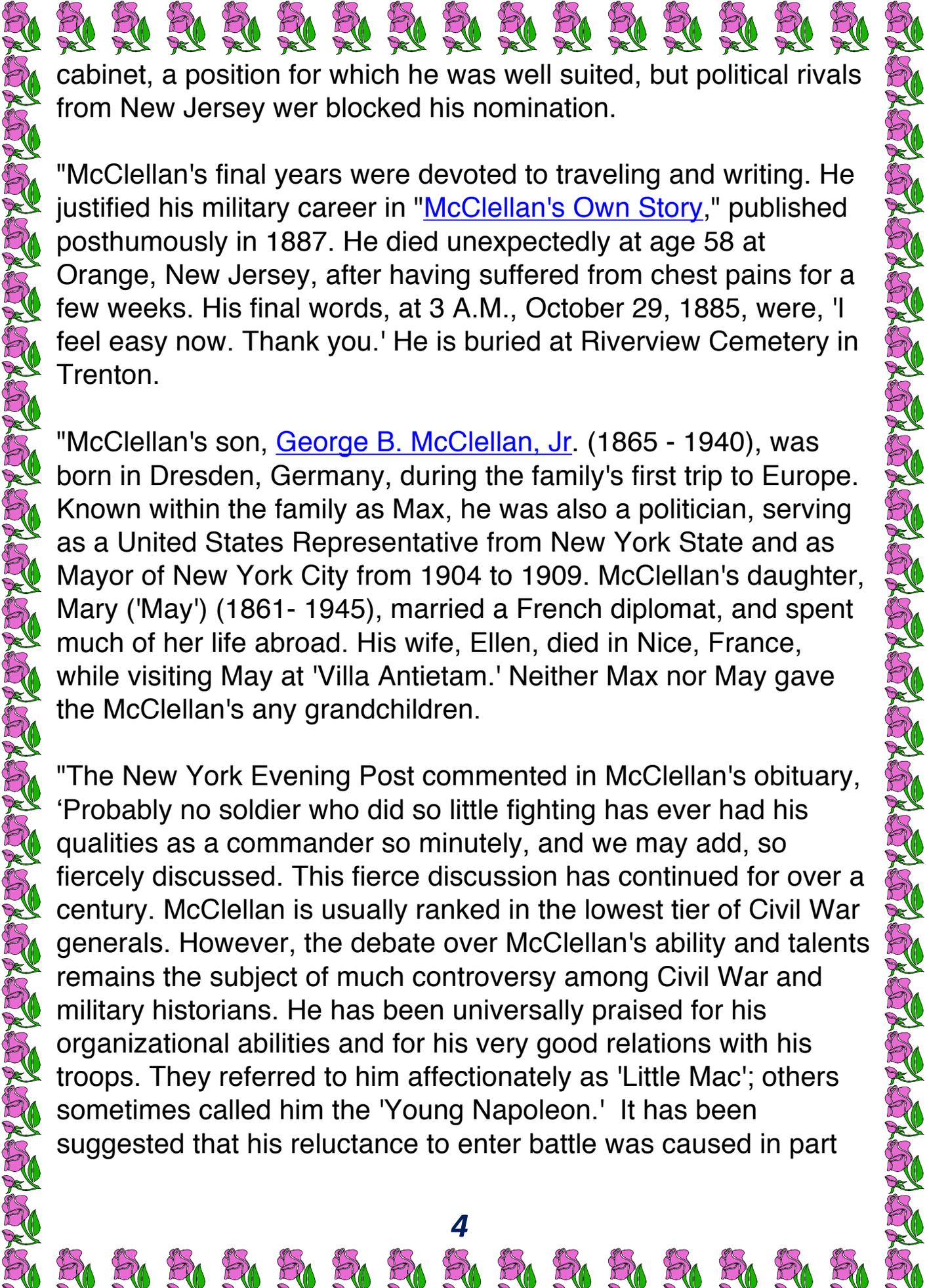
who could speak with greater certainty of the honors of war than General George McClellan?"

Source: Coulter, Ann, "Godless: The Church of Liberalism," published by Crown Forum, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, [www.crownpublishing.com](http://www.crownpublishing.com), 2006, ISBN10: -4000-5420-6, ISBN 13: 978-1-4000-5420-6, page 138

"After the war, McClellan and his family departed for a lengthy trip to Europe (from 1865 to 1868), during which he did not participate in politics. When he returned, the Democratic Party expressed some interest in nominating him for president again, but when it became clear that Ulysses S. Grant would be the Republican candidate, this interest died. McClellan worked on engineering projects in New York City and was offered the position of president of the newly formed University of California.

"McClellan was appointed chief engineer of [the New York City Department of Docks](#) in 1870. Evidently the position did not demand his full-time attention, because, starting in 1872, he also served as the president of the Atlantic and Great Western Railroad. He and his family returned to Europe from 1873 to 1875.

"In 1877, McClellan was nominated by the Democrats for Governor of New Jersey, an action that took him by surprise, because he had not expressed an interest in the position. He was elected, and served a single term from 1878 to 1881, a tenure marked by careful, conservative executive management, and minimal political rancor. The concluding chapter of his political career was his strong support in 1884 for the election of Grover Cleveland. He hoped to be named secretary of war in Cleveland's

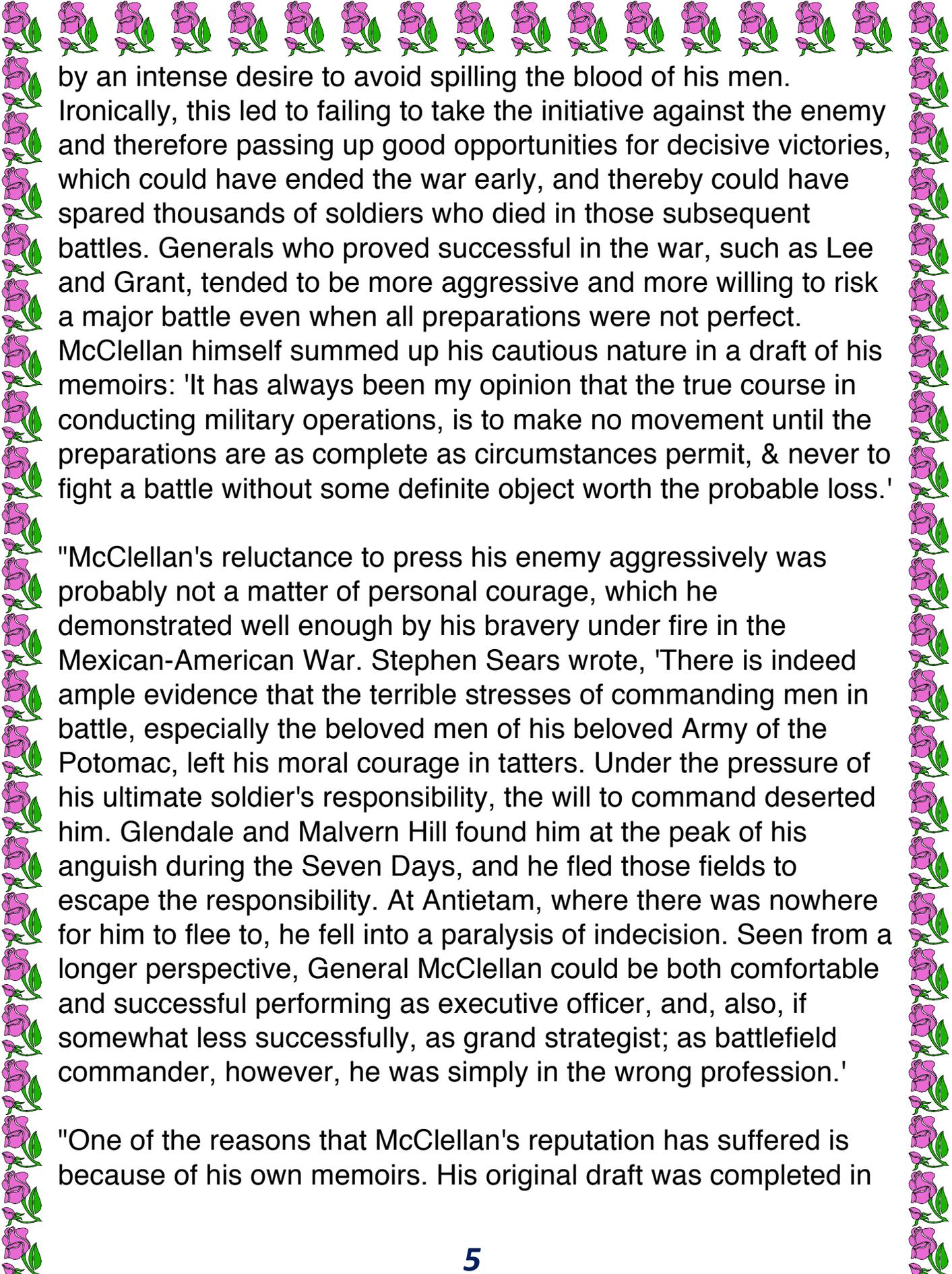


cabinet, a position for which he was well suited, but political rivals from New Jersey wer blocked his nomination.

"McClellan's final years were devoted to traveling and writing. He justified his military career in "[McClellan's Own Story](#)," published posthumously in 1887. He died unexpectedly at age 58 at Orange, New Jersey, after having suffered from chest pains for a few weeks. His final words, at 3 A.M., October 29, 1885, were, 'I feel easy now. Thank you.' He is buried at Riverview Cemetery in Trenton.

"McClellan's son, [George B. McClellan, Jr.](#) (1865 - 1940), was born in Dresden, Germany, during the family's first trip to Europe. Known within the family as Max, he was also a politician, serving as a United States Representative from New York State and as Mayor of New York City from 1904 to 1909. McClellan's daughter, Mary ('May') (1861- 1945), married a French diplomat, and spent much of her life abroad. His wife, Ellen, died in Nice, France, while visiting May at 'Villa Antietam.' Neither Max nor May gave the McClellan's any grandchildren.

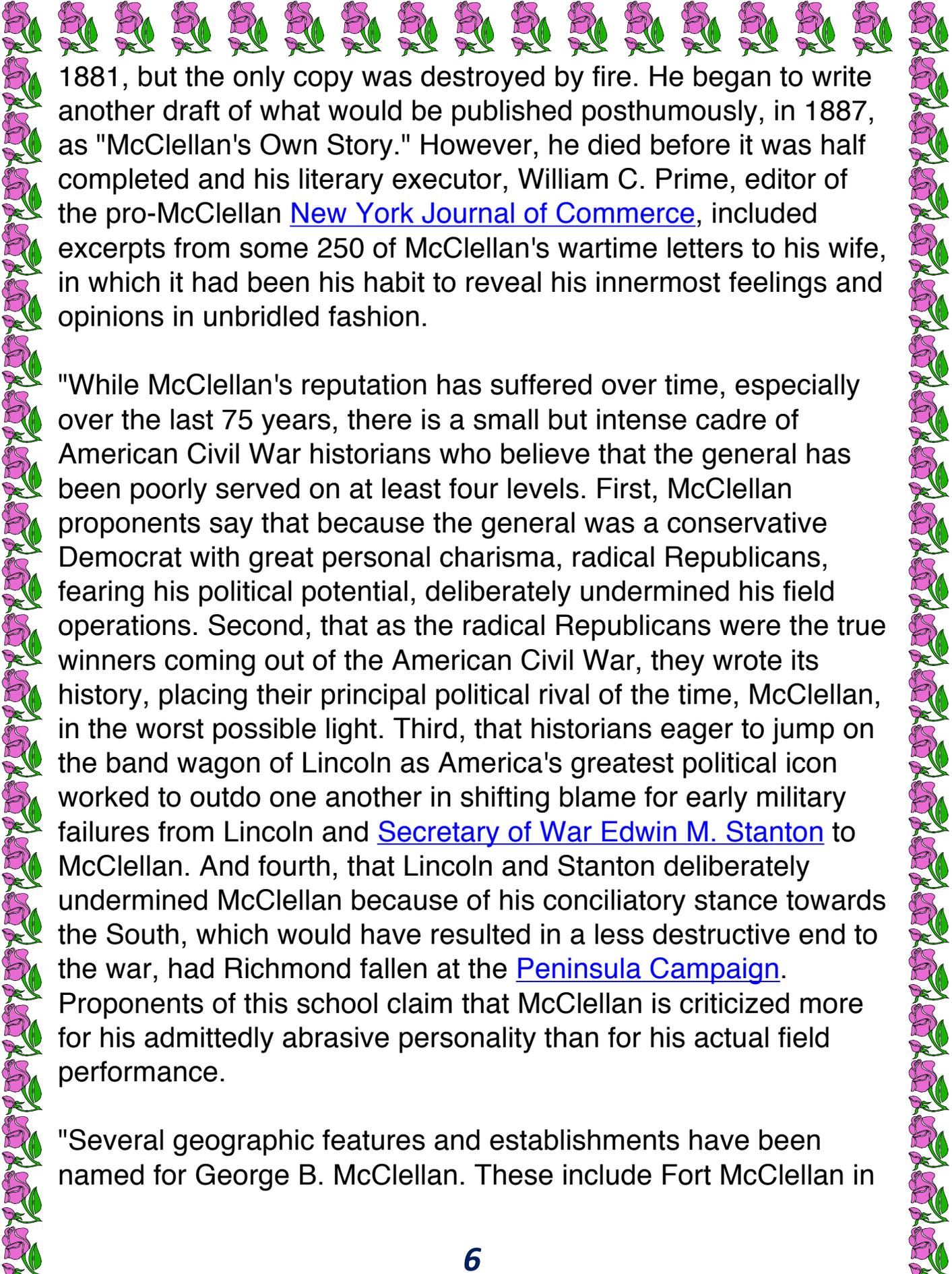
"The New York Evening Post commented in McClellan's obituary, 'Probably no soldier who did so little fighting has ever had his qualities as a commander so minutely, and we may add, so fiercely discussed. This fierce discussion has continued for over a century. McClellan is usually ranked in the lowest tier of Civil War generals. However, the debate over McClellan's ability and talents remains the subject of much controversy among Civil War and military historians. He has been universally praised for his organizational abilities and for his very good relations with his troops. They referred to him affectionately as 'Little Mac'; others sometimes called him the 'Young Napoleon.' It has been suggested that his reluctance to enter battle was caused in part



by an intense desire to avoid spilling the blood of his men. Ironically, this led to failing to take the initiative against the enemy and therefore passing up good opportunities for decisive victories, which could have ended the war early, and thereby could have spared thousands of soldiers who died in those subsequent battles. Generals who proved successful in the war, such as Lee and Grant, tended to be more aggressive and more willing to risk a major battle even when all preparations were not perfect. McClellan himself summed up his cautious nature in a draft of his memoirs: 'It has always been my opinion that the true course in conducting military operations, is to make no movement until the preparations are as complete as circumstances permit, & never to fight a battle without some definite object worth the probable loss.'

"McClellan's reluctance to press his enemy aggressively was probably not a matter of personal courage, which he demonstrated well enough by his bravery under fire in the Mexican-American War. Stephen Sears wrote, 'There is indeed ample evidence that the terrible stresses of commanding men in battle, especially the beloved men of his beloved Army of the Potomac, left his moral courage in tatters. Under the pressure of his ultimate soldier's responsibility, the will to command deserted him. Glendale and Malvern Hill found him at the peak of his anguish during the Seven Days, and he fled those fields to escape the responsibility. At Antietam, where there was nowhere for him to flee to, he fell into a paralysis of indecision. Seen from a longer perspective, General McClellan could be both comfortable and successful performing as executive officer, and, also, if somewhat less successfully, as grand strategist; as battlefield commander, however, he was simply in the wrong profession.'

"One of the reasons that McClellan's reputation has suffered is because of his own memoirs. His original draft was completed in



1881, but the only copy was destroyed by fire. He began to write another draft of what would be published posthumously, in 1887, as "McClellan's Own Story." However, he died before it was half completed and his literary executor, William C. Prime, editor of the pro-McClellan [New York Journal of Commerce](#), included excerpts from some 250 of McClellan's wartime letters to his wife, in which it had been his habit to reveal his innermost feelings and opinions in unbridled fashion.

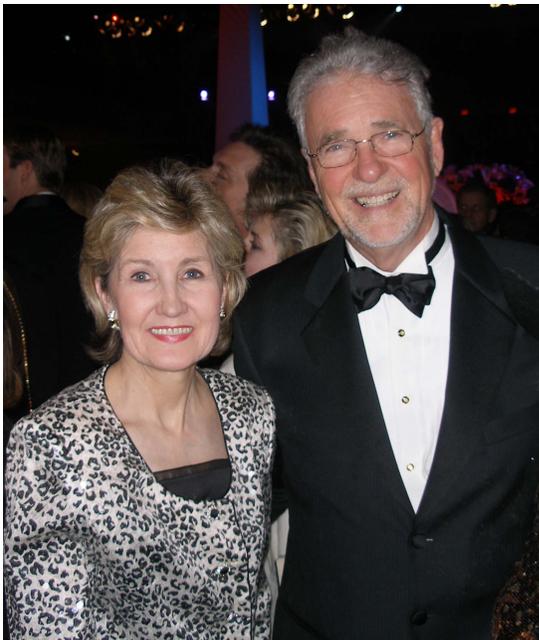
"While McClellan's reputation has suffered over time, especially over the last 75 years, there is a small but intense cadre of American Civil War historians who believe that the general has been poorly served on at least four levels. First, McClellan proponents say that because the general was a conservative Democrat with great personal charisma, radical Republicans, fearing his political potential, deliberately undermined his field operations. Second, that as the radical Republicans were the true winners coming out of the American Civil War, they wrote its history, placing their principal political rival of the time, McClellan, in the worst possible light. Third, that historians eager to jump on the band wagon of Lincoln as America's greatest political icon worked to outdo one another in shifting blame for early military failures from Lincoln and [Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton](#) to McClellan. And fourth, that Lincoln and Stanton deliberately undermined McClellan because of his conciliatory stance towards the South, which would have resulted in a less destructive end to the war, had Richmond fallen at the [Peninsula Campaign](#). Proponents of this school claim that McClellan is criticized more for his admittedly abrasive personality than for his actual field performance.

"Several geographic features and establishments have been named for George B. McClellan. These include Fort McClellan in

Alabama, McClellan Butte in the [Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest](#), where he traveled while conducting the Pacific Railroad Survey in 1853, McClellan Street in North Bend, Washington, McClellan Street in South Philadelphia, McClellan Elementary School in Chicago, and a bronze equestrian statue honoring General McClellan in Washington, D.C."

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_B.\\_McClellan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_B._McClellan)

The reputation of General George B. McClellan is a mixture of acclaim and of criticism. Regardless of which side one falls in viewing this well-known American General, he certainly was a complex and internationally-known personality on the world stage. It is a pleasure to share a remote family relationship with this man.



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*Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison with me @ the 2005 Presidential Inauguration Texas Society's Black Tie & Boots Ball. Today, she's the U.S. Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*