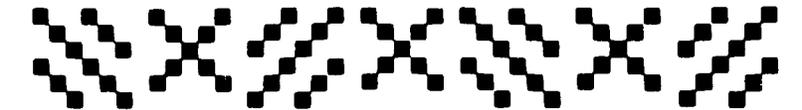


Alvin P. Hovey and Abraham Lincoln's "Broken Promises": The Politics of Promotion

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The promotion of Alvin P. Hovey to brevet major general of volunteers in July, 1864, was an incident of some note during the Civil War's Atlanta campaign. Angered by what he considered a political favor given to an unworthy officer, General William T. Sherman protested vigorously. President Abraham Lincoln, who had granted the promotion, responded, and historians have used this exchange to illustrate the personalities of both men. Thus overshadowed, Hovey's case receded into obscurity.¹

It is unfortunate that Hovey's promotion, as such, has not received more attention, for his story is informative concerning the way in which military appointments in the Civil War were intertwined with political considerations. Hovey's was not a simplistic case of military patronage, as Sherman believed, but an illustration of the mutable boundaries between politics and the military in a citizen army and the effects of that combination on the life of a man who successfully worked in both spheres. Hovey was a political general as were John A. Logan, Frank P. Blair, and other northwesterners. Unlike them, he failed to make maximum use of his talents as politician and as general to achieve advancement of the kind he desired.

Hovey's antebellum career established him as a significant personality in Indiana politics. Born in 1821 near Mount Vernon, Indiana, Hovey practiced law before embarking on a brief tour of duty in the Mexican War. He was a Democratic delegate to the

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¹ Lloyd Lewis, *Sherman: Fighting Prophet* (1932; reprint, New York, 1958), 390; B. H. Liddell Hart, *Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American* (1929; reprint, New York, 1958), 287; Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln*, Volume III, *The War Years* (6 vols., New York, 1926-1939), 154-55.



ALVIN PETERSON HOVEY

Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Indiana Constitutional Convention of 1850 and became judge of the state's Third Judicial District the next year. In 1854 he was appointed to Indiana's Supreme Court and served as president of the Democratic state convention in 1855. During the following two years he served as United States district attorney for Indiana. For an unexplained reason Hovey switched to the Republican party and ran for Congress in 1858. Defeated, he rejoined the Democrats and practiced law at Mount Vernon. Having filled a variety of state offices, he became acquainted with many men who later played roles in his attempt to gain military advancement.²

A dedicated War Democrat, Hovey offered his services to the Union during the Civil War. In May, 1861, he and Robert Dale Owen obtained arms for Posey County volunteers in Indianapolis. Because of his successful recruiting efforts Hovey became colonel

² Charles M. Walker, *Hovey and Chase* (Indianapolis, 1888), 7-30; William W. Sweet, "Alvin Peterson Hovey," *Dictionary of American Biography*, IX (New York, 1943), 270-71.

of the 24th Indiana Infantry in July. The regiment joined Ulysses S. Grant's army after the fall of Fort Donelson and almost missed the battle of Shiloh as well. As part of Lew Wallace's division, the 24th Indiana marched and countermarched all day on April 6 before finding the battlefield. Hovey was mentioned favorably by Wallace for his battle performance the following day. He won promotion to brigadier general of volunteers on April 28, 1862.³

With his new rank Hovey began to move in higher circles and to fill more important positions. He commanded occupation forces in Memphis for a few days in June until Sherman ordered him south to Helena, Arkansas. Hovey spent the following eight months at that advanced post, at one point commanding the District of Eastern Arkansas. He energetically led raids into the Arkansas hinterland in August and November, 1862, although they yielded no significant results. Arkansas was a sideshow to the great objective of opening the Mississippi River, and Hovey's expedition toward Grenada, Mississippi, late that year supported Grant's first effort to capture Vicksburg. Hovey diverted Confederate attention from Grant, although the latter's campaign failed, and won praise from his superiors.⁴

Before the winter of 1863 Hovey's war views were consonant with those of other conservatives who supported the Union. He advocated vigorous action against armed opponents but lenient treatment of noncombatants. His dispatches from Helena conveyed eagerness to take the offensive, leading Sherman to prophesy success for the Grenada Expedition: "I know that General Hovey's heart is in it . . ." Earlier, the Indianan tried to rid Memphis of Confederate sympathizers by allowing men of military age to go south without paroles. Sherman believed the order resulted in more recruits for the Confederate army but allowed it to stand until an expiration date prearranged by Hovey. Expressing his desire to wage a decent fight, Hovey wrote in October:

³ Walker, *Hovey and Chase*, 33-36; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* . . . (2 vols., 1903; reprint, Urbana, 1965), I, 545; Alvin P. Hovey to D. C. Coleman, April 8, 1862, U.S., War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (128 vols., Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. I, Vol. X, Part 1, pp. 191-92; Lewis Wallace to John A. Rawlins, April 12, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 173. The latter work is hereafter cited as *Official Records*, and, unless otherwise noted, all citations are to Series I.

⁴ Ulysses S. Grant to Henry W. Halleck, June 24, 1862, *Official Records*, Vol. XVII, Part 2, p. 30; William T. Sherman to Rawlins, July 25, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 121; Hovey to H. Z. Curtis, August 17, 1862, *ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 207; Hovey to H. Z. Curtis, November 22, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 358-59; General Orders No. 11, Department of the Missouri, November 2, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 777; Hovey to Frederick Steele, December 5, 1862, *ibid.*, Vol. XVII, Part 1, p. 531; Samuel R. Curtis to Halleck, December 16, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 529.

“My heartfelt desire is to terminate this unhappy struggle with as little injury to non-combatants and as few violations of the rules of civilized warfare as possible.”⁵

Those views modified during the winter as Hovey witnessed the impact of a dual policy toward southerners. During the Grenada Expedition he found the Mississippi countryside filled with goods purchased from northern traders who took advantage of a lenient Federal trade policy with southern civilians. Military information traveled south with the traders, convincing Hovey that a liberal policy toward noncombatants was inconsistent with a vigorous policy toward soldiers. “War and commerce with the same people! What a Utopian dream!” he complained in December, 1862. The surest sign of his conversion to a vigorous prosecution against civilians as well as fighters occurred when Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas spoke to the troops at Helena about the government’s plan to arm freed blacks. Hovey endorsed the measure and added: “I want all the cotton burned north and south, all trade stopped, all commerce closed. I want all the women and children, especially of rebels, reduced to starvation and want. This will bring their friends home who are fighting us.”⁶

The radicalization of Hovey’s war views occurred at the same time that promotion became obviously important to him. On January 30, 1863, the field officers of his unit petitioned Lincoln to give Hovey a commission as major general. They cited his service as a division leader and “his untiring energy and unselfish patriotism . . .” The officers had no trouble convincing their commander. He sent a copy of the petition to his wife and wrote to her: “I have the proud consolation of having deserved promotion whether I get it or not.”⁷ Hovey might have contemplated pro-

⁵ Sherman quotation in Sherman to Steele, November 25, 1862, *ibid.*, Vol. XVII, Part 2, p. 875; Sherman to Dr. E. S. Plummer and others, July 23, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 114; Sherman to Rawlins, July 25, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 122; Hovey to Theophilus H. Holmes, October 29, 1862, *ibid.*, Ser. II, Vol. IV, p. 665. Hovey’s biographer tried to explain the Memphis order by claiming that his subject “considered a thousand armed enemies without the federal lines less dangerous than a thousand enemies within, even though the latter should be armed only with a bitter and venomous tongue.” He erroneously believed that Sherman agreed with Hovey’s opinion. Walker, *Hovey and Chase*, 42.

⁶ Hovey to Steele, December 5, 1862, *Official Records*, Vol. XVII, Part 1, p. 532; Lorenzo Thomas to Edwin M. Stanton, April 6, 1863, *ibid.*, Ser. III, Vol. III, p. 117. For Hovey’s Helena speech see enclosure of Joseph G. Peavy to Holmes, April 17, 1863, *ibid.*, Ser. I, Vol. XXII, Part 2, p. 826.

⁷ Hovey to Mary Hovey, February 8, 1863, Alvin P. Hovey Papers (Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington); copy of petition to Lincoln, January 30, 1863, in *ibid.* Hovey’s division contained many Indiana units as well as regiments from Ohio, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Missouri.

motion earlier, but his officers made it a real possibility in his mind.

Hovey thereafter began to maneuver with the skill of an experienced politician. He considered his vigorous war views as a tool of promotion. On February 2 he authored a circular that responded to antiwar sentiment in the Northwest. Endorsed by many of his officers who shared his politics, the circular urged Indianans to ignore southern efforts to alienate northern Democrats from the war effort. Hovey argued that North and South could not live peaceably if separated and stressed the shame of northern subservience to a despotic southern aristocracy. He sent a copy of this jeremiad to Samuel R. Curtis, his department commander, who heartily endorsed his views and forwarded them to Lincoln.⁸ As a result, two key superiors became acquainted with Hovey's vocal support for the Union.

In addition to creating a good image in the right circles, Hovey tried to regain field command and prove himself in battle. Opportunities were few at Helena; in fact, he was demoted to brigade command in February when a new superior officer arrived. Hovey traveled downriver to see Grant personally about a command in the operations against Vicksburg. Returning with a promise of aid, Hovey assured his wife: "When I am once more in battle I will [earn] my promotion, whether I receive it or not." Hovey constantly worried that people he considered less qualified might be advanced before him. He decided to resign if that occurred and began to brood at Helena while waiting for word from Grant. The promotions of "mere partizans" like Blair and Cadwallader C. Washburn, "who never fought a battle," seemed to prove his worst fears, but he retained hope. Hovey sent a blank petition asking for his promotion to a Mount Vernon friend, requesting him to circulate it for signatures and forward the document to Washington.⁹

Grant gave Hovey command of the 12th Division, 13th Corps, of his army, and the Indianan filled the position well. At the battle

⁸ Walker, *Hovey and Chase*, 52-55; Samuel R. Curtis to Hovey, February 14, 1863, Hovey Papers. On February 26 Hovey sent to Curtis what the latter described as a "patriotic letter." Curtis passed it on to Lincoln, hoping the president would "read the views of a Democratic General who has done good Service in my command." Curtis to Hovey, March 10, 1863, *ibid*.

⁹ Willis A. Gorman to Samuel R. Curtis, February 13, 1863, *Official Records*, Vol. XXII, Part 2, pp. 110-11; Hovey to Mary Hovey, February 21, March 12, 1863, Hovey Papers. In addition to his politically influential family, the justification for Blair's promotion lay in his important role in maintaining Missouri for the Union in 1861. Washburn's brother, Elihu, was a congressman of some influence from Illinois.

of Champion's Hill, May 16, 1863, he turned in the best performance of his career. Grant and corps commander John A. McClernand were impressed with his energy and determination. Hovey carefully guarded his reputation, investigating unidentified reports that claimed other units replaced his during the battle rather than supported it. Later that summer he participated in the siege of Vicksburg and the subsequent campaign against Jackson, Mississippi.¹⁰

The resulting visibility paid dividends, and Hovey supplemented it with continued lobbying. On June 9 his officers again petitioned Lincoln for their commander's promotion. Hovey sent a copy of the document to his acquaintance, Robert Dale Owen, who served as secretary of the American Freedman's Inquiry Commission. Owen, an adopted Indianan who had actively supported emancipation and who had fought sectional division within the North, passed it on to Lincoln with his endorsement. John Palmer Usher, a Terre Haute lawyer and Indiana state legislator who became secretary of the Interior in 1863, spoke to Lincoln on Hovey's behalf. The president expected Grant to recommend Hovey for promotion, and he intended to nominate him. Lincoln admitted that the Indianan had been on his list the previous winter, but he could do nothing for him because of the limited number of commissions available. Because of Hovey's impressive work around Vicksburg, his new corps commander, Edward O.C. Ord, forwarded his name to Grant. The recommendation went to Army Headquarters and General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck forwarded it to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton in August, 1863.¹¹

Soon after Vicksburg, Hovey traveled north to visit his wife, who had been ill for some time. In September, so that he could be near Mary, Grant ordered Hovey to remain at home to "procure" volunteers in Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana. While engaged in the double duty of husband and officer, Hovey continued to worry about his stalled promotion. Nothing seemed to happen. James Hughes, an Indiana lawyer who served as a judge of the United

¹⁰ Hovey to Walter B. Scates, May 25, June 8, July 5, 24, 1863, *Official Records*, Vol. XXIV, Part 2, pp. 40-46, 46-47, 240-41, 597-99; John A. McClernand to Rawlins, June 17, 1863, *ibid.*, Part 1, p. 150.

¹¹ Many of the officers who signed the new petition had been among the signers of the January petition as well. Copy of petition to Lincoln, June 9, 1863, Hovey Papers; Robert Dale Owen to Hovey, July 20, 1863, *ibid.*; John P. Usher to Hovey, July 30, 1863, *ibid.*; Broadus Mitchell, "Robert Dale Owen," *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIV, 118-20; Thomas LeGrand Harris, "John Palmer Usher, *ibid.*, XIX, 134-35; Edward O. C. Ord to Rawlins, July 27, 1863, in John Y. Simon, ed., *Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* (10 vols. to date, Carbondale, 1967-), IX, 72n; Grant to Thomas, July 27, 1863, *ibid.*, 124; Halleck to Stanton, August 10, 1863, *ibid.*, 125n.

States Court of Claims in Washington, asked Lincoln the reason. The president seemed surprised that Hovey was still a brigadier general and asked Hughes to present his case in writing so that he could examine and act on it. The routing of Hovey's recommendation through Stanton had kept Lincoln in the dark, but Hughes was confident that his friend would be confirmed during the Senate's next session.¹²

Hovey was never so certain of his promotion as were his friends. In addition to career problems he suffered a severe personal blow when Mary died in late November. The day after her burial he wrote to Grant asking for orders. If a field command was not available, he wanted to remain in Indiana to organize and train new recruits for the spring campaigns. Almost inevitably the subject of promotion came up. Hovey wanted to correct the by-passing of Lincoln in the process of forwarding his recommendation so the president could know that his name had been officially advanced long before. Grant failed to oblige Hovey in that matter but ordered him to work with recruits at Indianapolis.¹³

The assignment placed Hovey in the heart of political Indiana. In February, 1864, the state's Republicans convened to nominate their ticket, presidential electors, and delegates to the national convention. In addition to calling themselves the Union party, Republicans tried to broaden their base of support by nominating War Democrats to fill state offices. Hovey "persistently refused" to be included but was gratified when the party urged his promotion. It made the array of endorsements complete; his subordinate officers, his superiors, and now his political compeers supported him.¹⁴

As the winter progressed, Hovey learned that even those positive endorsements made no headway against the system of army promotion. As Hughes informed him, there were limited shares of the pie and too many hungry gourmands. Hughes discovered that Indiana Senator Henry Smith Lane, a Republican who served on the Committee on Military Affairs, had tried to

¹² Hovey to Grant, August 20, 1863, *Grant Papers*, IX, 126n; Special Orders No. 256, Department of the Tennessee, September 18, 1863, *ibid.*; James Hughes to Hovey, November 4, 1863, Hovey Papers; William O. Lynch, "James Hughes," *Dictionary of American Biography*, IX, 351-52.

¹³ Hovey to Grant, November 19, 1863, *Grant Papers*, IX, 126n-27n; Special Orders No. 24, Military Division of the Mississippi, December 20, 1863, *Official Records*, Vol. XXXI, Part 3, p. 455.

¹⁴ Kenneth M. Stampp, *Indiana Politics during the Civil War (Indiana Historical Collections, Vol. XXXI, 1949; reprint, Bloomington, 1978), 220-23; Hovey to his daughter Essie, February 26, 1864, Hovey Papers.*

secure promotion for Hovey and another Indianan, Nathan Kimball. The latter held a less attractive military record but exerted more political pull. He had traveled to Washington and had persuaded Indiana congressmen to recommend his advancement. That endorsement somewhat overshadowed Hovey's, and Hughes counseled his friend not to confront Kimball publicly about the issue. He suggested private efforts and persuaded Frank P. Blair, Jr., whose "influence with the President is great," to see Lincoln.¹⁵

Blair did not want to meddle in Indiana affairs but obliged Hughes because of a sense of duty to a vigorous Unionist. He believed Hovey had priority in the promotion sweepstakes because of his work in the Vicksburg campaign, and he discovered that Lincoln was surfeited with information on the worthy general. Lincoln assured Blair that he would soon nominate Hovey, but a few weeks before he had thrown up his hands while talking with Schuyler Colfax about the subject. Colfax, the Republican speaker of the House, and other Indiana representatives had requested that Lincoln create another major generalcy for someone from their state. The president gave them little hope, remarking that Iowa had no major general and he could not give her one, much less add another to Indiana's credit. He either disremembered or lied to help himself evade pressure from his group of visitors, for Iowa had at least one major general, Samuel R. Curtis. Colfax, who had helped secure Hovey's promotion to brigadier general in 1862, offered the Indianan more hope in early February when he relayed Lane's optimistic view of the promotion prospects.¹⁶

The pattern for the winter was set; chained to his job in Indianapolis, Hovey could do little more than correspond with his lobbyists and rely on their generally optimistic reports. Cyrus M. Allen, Republican speaker of the Indiana House and a "fast friend" of Lincoln, sent word that the president considered Hovey "one of the first if not the very first to be appointed . . ." Allen complained to the president that one of Hovey's juniors, Cadwallader C. Washburn, had been promoted before him and that Lincoln had earlier promised that Peter J. Osterhaus would be the next man to receive a major general's commission. Lincoln "frowned [,] shrugged his shoulders and intimated that political considerations or rather influences" had advanced Washburn. Setting the

¹⁵ Hughes to Hovey, January 25, 1864, Hovey Papers; Paul L. Haworth, "Henry Smith Lane," *Dictionary of American Biography*, X, 574-75.

¹⁶ Frank P. Blair, Jr., to Hovey, January 26, 1864, Hovey Papers; Schuyler Colfax to Hovey, January 24, February 1, 1864, *ibid.*; William McDonald, "Schuyler Colfax," *Dictionary of American Biography*, IV, 297-98.

record straight, the president insisted that he had said "the first Dutchman appointed shall be Osterhaus." Lincoln assured Allen that he recognized Hovey's sterling qualities. He had "desired to promote him without the ability to do so" and promised to nominate him as soon as possible. The president repeated this promise to Colfax and John D. Defrees, an Indianan he had appointed government printer.¹⁷

Those assurances made little difference; no promotion arrived, and spring brought a return to the field. Hovey had worked energetically to raise new troops. In January, 1864, he had issued a call promising recruits the opportunity to serve in a brigade composed entirely of Indiana regiments. Grant had hoped Hovey could organize and ready the men for duty by spring. Ten regiments were created, five of infantry and five of cavalry. The former were put under Hovey's orders and sent to Georgia via eastern Tennessee, where they became a division of the 23rd Corps. Grant sent the cavalry units to Kentucky.¹⁸

Hovey's brief participation in the Atlanta campaign offered a strange contrast to his earlier field work. At the battle of Resaca, May 15, 1864, his division received orders to move seven hundred yards across an open field exposed to Confederate fire in order to support Alpheus S. Williams's division of the 20th Corps. Hovey reported that his troops, although new, ran across the field and drove their enemy "like smoke before the wind." Williams described it differently and probably more accurately. He urged Hovey to support his command, but the Indianan admitted that his men "could not be got through the line of artillery fire." Indeed, they did not move up until the Rebels had been driven back. Hovey had poor soldiers to command, "many of whom were old men and boys," according to the Army of the Ohio's medical director, and they suffered a high rate of physical disability. Corps leader John M. Schofield believed the problem lay in Hovey's mind. "He seems incapable of comprehending an order or of having any definite idea of what is transpiring around him." As a result, Schofield considered him untrustworthy in the field.¹⁹

¹⁷ Stamp, *Indiana Politics during the Civil War*, 84, 221; Cyrus M. Allen to Hovey, February 4, 1864, Hovey Papers; John D. Defrees to Hovey, February 29, 1864, *ibid.*; Colfax to Hovey, April 9, 1864, *ibid.*; William Wesley Woollen, *Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1883), 485-88.

¹⁸ Walker, *Hovey and Chase*, 113; Grant to Hovey, February 9, 1864, *Grant Papers*, X, 97; Grant to Oliver P. Morton, March 17, 1864, *ibid.*, 202n-203n; Special Orders No. 101, Department of the Ohio, April 10, 1864, *Official Records*, Vol. XXXII, Part 3, p. 320.

¹⁹ Hovey to J. A. Campbell, June 9, 1864, *Official Records*, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 2, p. 541; Alpheus S. Williams to daughter, June 10, 1864, in Milo M. Quaife, ed., *From the Cannon's Mouth: The Civil War Letters of General Alpheus S. Williams* (Detroit, 1959), 317; Report of Surgeon Henry S. Hewitt, January, 1865, *Official Records*, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 2, p. 522; John M. Schofield to Sherman, May 10, 1864, *ibid.*, Part 4, p. 122.

A number of factors combined to decrease Hovey's efficiency by the spring of 1864. The loss of his wife might have depressed him. Certainly, the inferior condition of his raw troops was important in explaining his poor performance. A major factor, however, appears to have been bitterness over the long-delayed advancement. Not only had Hovey's promotion been consistently postponed despite repeated assurances to the contrary but his plans to lead an Indiana legion had also fallen apart. He insisted that the cavalry units he had raised be added to his division, a desire that was inconsistent with his previous attitude and irrational in professional terms. During the Vicksburg campaign Hovey had worked hard to learn the ways of a professional soldier whose primary aim was to serve his subordinates. According to Charles A. Dana, a War Department observer with Grant's army, Hovey tried "to learn the military profession just as if he expected to spend his life in it." Dana also noted that Hovey was too concerned about personal renown to be given complete confidence as a military leader, but in 1863 that flaw did not mar his reputation or his field performance.²⁰ One year later, after the death of his wife and to a large degree because of the repeated frustration of his ambition, Hovey was a different kind of soldier.

The months of deferred hope for his promotion had set the foundation for Hovey's emotional estrangement from the army. The refusal to increase his division's size was the final catalyst for his physical estrangement. The Indianan offered his resignation on June 6, 1864, citing the failure to promote him and the diversion of his cavalry regiments to other commands. "I cannot be thus humbled and consent to serve longer," he concluded. As Hovey informed his daughter, Lincoln's "broken promises" had been the cause of his discontent, and he insisted on leaving the army "unless he [the president] gives me a Major Generalship and a larger command . . ."²¹

Hovey's resignation encountered opposition from Schofield and Sherman. The former modified his opinion of the month before, apparently deciding that Hovey should remain unless a more competent man could be found to replace him; the latter was reluctant to approve a resignation for the reasons Hovey advanced. The cavalry regiments were not mounted because of a shortage of horses and funds; in addition, they guarded supply

²⁰ Charles A. Dana to Stanton, July 12, 1863, in Charles A. Dana, *Recollections of the Civil War, with the Leaders at Washington and in the Field in the Sixties* (New York, 1902), 64.

²¹ Hovey to Thomas, June 6, 1864, Hovey Papers; Hovey to Essie, June 8, 1864, *ibid.*

lines to the army in Georgia, and Sherman could not replace them even had he wanted to add them to Hovey's command. A division consisting half of infantry and half of cavalry was out of the question; it would "no more make a unit in a good whole than oil and water will commingle." Sherman had nothing to do with promises for promotion. He wanted Hovey to reconsider his decision or propose different reasons for resigning. The Indianan discussed it at length with Sherman on June 9 but remained adamant. Unwilling to create a hybrid unit or subtract regiments from another division for him, and unable to promote him, Sherman decided to approve Hovey's resignation. Before accepting a leave of absence sending him north to await the decision of authorities in Washington, Hovey referred to the resignation in a farewell message to his command. "It is enough for me to say that I think a due regard to my personal honor and the honor of my State demand it."²²

Hovey faced similar opposition in Washington. Ironically, he called on the same friends who had lobbied for his promotion to push for his resignation. Colfax informed him gently that his repeated requests for aid began to wear thin. Taking time out of his busy schedule, the speaker visited Lincoln on June 18 and showed him Hovey's letters explaining his reasons for leaving the army. According to Colfax the president took it badly, remarking "that they were the only things he had seen in you [Hovey] that he did not like . . ." Lincoln decided not to accept the resignation for he had sincerely intended to promote Hovey, and he tried to enlighten Colfax on the reasons for advancing other officers instead. Richard J. Oglesby of Illinois had resigned and desired that Grenville M. Dodge of Iowa fill his place. Lincoln felt he could not disoblige the former. Although James B. Steedman of Ohio had less priority than Hovey, Lincoln had nevertheless signed his commission when Stanton had forwarded it. Unwilling to block Steedman's promotion after it had gone so far as to be confirmed by the Senate, the president "did not like to refuse to sign it, as he had always intended to promote him." It was the same story that Hovey's lobbyists had heard time and time again, and Colfax realized the futility of his mission. After referring Lincoln to a petition by Indiana's presidential electors endorsing Hovey's promotion, Colfax "concluded the unpleasant interview." He re-

²² Schofield to Sherman, June 8, 1864, *Official Records*, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 4, p. 438-39; Sherman to Schofield, June 8, 9, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 439, 443-44; Sherman to Stanton, June 8, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 433; Special Field Orders No. 22, Army of the Ohio, June 9, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 448; Hovey to 1st Division, 23rd Corps, June 9, 1864, Hovey Papers.

minded Hovey of the president's busy schedule and plethora of more important problems, hoping the Indianan would realize "how unattractive is the duty of presenting such" matters.²³

Lincoln's refusal did not move Hovey. He wrote directly to the president asking for "the poor privilege of retiring to private life" if Lincoln would not rectify the conditions that had inspired his resignation. "I am now unfit to command," he wrote, "I could not go back to my little Brigade called a Division without deep humiliation."²⁴

The president did not give up either. As Interior Secretary Usher informed Hovey, Lincoln considered putting him in charge of the 14th Corps in Georgia. Considering Sherman's knowledge of Hovey, it was unrealistic to believe that he would approve of the Indianan's filling such a responsible position. Lincoln dropped the idea in favor of a purely honorary promotion. He nominated Hovey for a brevet commission as major general, which advanced him in no practical way but might soothe his ego. The commission was approved by the Senate and sent to Indiana by mid-July. Hovey accepted it on the eighteenth.²⁵

Although Hovey took the commission, it did not satisfy him. Stanton requested that he withdraw his resignation. The partial promotion had been a kind gesture by the president, Hovey admitted, but in his view it changed nothing. He insisted on leaving the army. The authorities were equally insistent that he stay, and the impasse continued.²⁶

The advancement, minor as it was, provoked a strong response from Sherman. On July 24 James A. Hardie, inspector general of the army, informed him that Osterhaus had been promoted to the full rank of major general. Sherman viewed his and

²³ Colfax to Hovey, June 19, 1864, Hovey Papers; copy of petition of United States Central Committee, June 15, 1864, *ibid.* No firm answer exists as to why Lincoln was unwilling to disoblige Oglesby but apparently did not mind disobligeing Hovey. Oglesby was, however, a rising political figure; indeed, he ran successfully for the Illinois governorship in 1864 on a Republican pro-war ticket. The process of submitting nominees for promotion to the Senate was very loose during the Civil War. Apparently someone submitted Steedman's name without Lincoln's knowledge, and after Senate confirmation, the president hesitated to block the promotion. Hovey's name was never presented to the Senate.

²⁴ Hovey to Lincoln, June 23, 1864, *ibid.*

²⁵ Usher to Hovey, July 5, 1864, *ibid.*; S. F. Chalfin to Hovey, July 15, 1864, *ibid.*

²⁶ Stanton to Hovey, July 19, 1864, *ibid.*; Hovey to Stanton, July 21, 1864, *ibid.* Hovey tried to obscure his acceptance of the brevet appointment. On a copy of his letter to Stanton he stated that he had declined the promotion. The Chalfin document, which was mailed with his commission, clearly indicates that Hovey accepted it on July 18. In addition, his letter to Stanton does not specifically accept or reject the appointment.

Hovey's appointments as insults by the Washington authorities. The officers were absent in order to seek "personal advancement," he informed Hardie, and concluded with this provocative remark: "If the rear be the post of honor, then we had better all change front on Washington."²⁷

Sherman was brief and pointed. His letter went beyond Hardie's hands to Lincoln, who replied in measured, wholly judicious terms. He agreed that Sherman had a good point but reminded him that he, Grant, and others had wanted the two men promoted long before. Lincoln therefore felt committed to their advancement. Although he disliked Hovey's decision to leave the army, he realized that the Indianan had some reason for discontent. Lincoln had been unaware of Osterhaus's absence, however, and still did not know the reason for it. The German's promotion had been made "somewhat on his nationality"; again, political reasons edged Hovey out of his anticipated reward. Lincoln assured his correspondent that no more appointments would be made without his advice.²⁸

Lincoln's dispatch sobered the impulsive Sherman, and he explained his rashness in terms as judicious as Lincoln's. Correcting a misimpression in his earlier dispatch, Sherman noted that Osterhaus had left the army because of "temporary sickness." Nevertheless, he reemphasized his displeasure and expanded on the reasons for it. If the two had been promoted a year before, when they had been nominated, no harm would have occurred. From the beginning of the Atlanta campaign Sherman had decided not to recommend anyone for promotion until "some stage in the game" had been reached to allow him "to balance accounts . . ." The promotions worked injury on his officers' morale. "They come to me and point them out as evidence that I am wrong in encouraging them to a silent, patient discharge of duty. I assure you that every general of my army has spoken of it and referred to it as evidence that promotion results from importunity and not from actual service." He complimented Lincoln's "marked skill in the matter of military appointments," believing the president had apportioned them as well as possible.²⁹

Contemporaries and historians tended to support Sherman's views in this minor confrontation. Grant expressed regret over Osterhaus's promotion while that officer was not on active duty. Jacob Dolson Cox, a division leader in the 23rd Corps, regarded

²⁷ Sherman to James A. Hardie, July 25, 1864, *Official Records*, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 5, p. 247.

²⁸ Lincoln to Sherman, July 26, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 259-60.

²⁹ Sherman to Lincoln, July 27, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 271.

Sherman's protest as "righteous . . . a memorable effort in favor of good military administration." Lincoln acted irresponsibly, in Cox's view, when he advanced officers without the immediate advice of their superiors. The administration did "not seem even to have asked the question what was going on in Georgia and what would be the effect of such action upon the army there!" Biographer Lloyd Lewis accepted Cox's analysis, and military historian B. H. Liddell Hart also sided with the generals.³⁰

Sherman was able to assume his stance because he had limited responsibilities. As a field commander he was concerned with efficiently accomplishing military objectives. The promotions injured morale to some degree, as a remark by Williams proved: "The whole system of promotion is by the practice of a low grovelling lick-spittle subserving and pandering . . ." The incident prompted Williams to announce privately his decision to resign as soon as he could do so honorably, a desire he later relinquished. Sherman distributed copies of Lincoln's July 26 dispatch to his army and division leaders in order to neutralize their discontent. His anger over the promotions had been caused partially by his neglect to ask Lincoln to defer appointments until he recommended them. Sherman had written this request on July 24, but it did not reach Washington in time to postpone either promotion. Nevertheless, Sherman put his house in order quickly and made positive gains because of the controversy. On July 28 Hardie asked him to nominate eight colonels for commissions as brigadier generals. As Cox noted, Sherman was primarily concerned with exerting some control over promotions in his command. His judgments in this regard were based almost entirely on military grounds.³¹

Lincoln could not be so narrow in making decisions. His responsibilities lay in two spheres rather than one, political and military, and he had to balance the considerations of both to arrive at a compromise. Lincoln was a political commander appointing large numbers of citizen soldiers to wage a democratic war. Hovey enjoyed strong support among members of both parties in Indiana

³⁰ Grant to Stanton, July 26, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 260; Jacob Dolson Cox, *Military Reminiscences of the Civil War* (2 vols., New York, 1900), II, 251-52; Lewis, *Sherman: Fighting Prophet*, 390; Hart, *Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American*, 287. Sherman was consistent in his postwar reminiscences, maintaining the same stance that he had assumed in 1864. William T. Sherman, *Memoirs* (2 vols., New York, 1875), II, 94-95.

³¹ Williams to daughters, July 15, 1864, in Quaife, *From the Cannon's Mouth*, 332; Sherman to Lincoln, July 27, 1864, *Official Records*, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 5, p. 271; Sherman to Halleck, July 24, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 241; Sherman, *Memoirs*, II, 95.

and had demonstrated his military ability in 1863; yet, those qualifications apparently were inadequate. Lincoln did not provide a clear-cut explanation for his deferral of Hovey's promotion; but the answer seems to lie in the quality of the Indiana's recommendations, the small number of openings existing for major generals by the war's midpoint, and the qualifications of Hovey's competitors. The Indiana interests that Hovey represented had other champions who were solidly dedicated to the Lincoln administration. Other men appointed for political reasons came from less certain constituencies: Logan from the Upper South residents of southern Illinois, Blair from politically volatile Missouri, and Osterhaus from the vocal and radical German-American community. Hovey was a mainstream politician with only one outstanding campaign to his credit. His support was desirable but not essential, so Lincoln offered him enough to retain his services but not so much as to hinder the patronage power he needed to secure the good will of more valuable men. The president's insistence on keeping Hovey in the army illustrated his successful efforts to balance the sometimes conflicting requirements of politics and military professionalism.

The degeneration of Hovey's field efficiency did not render him a supernumerary in the army. In August, while awaiting a decision on his resignation, Hovey assumed command of a few Indiana militiamen and conducted a foray into Kentucky. Rebel forces had gathered there, apparently to menace Indiana, and he could not sit idly by while his home was in danger. The action resulted in unimportant skirmishing, but it sparked efforts by the War Department to give him further employment. Ignoring the resignation, Stanton assigned him to command the District of Indiana, and he accepted. Hovey left the army long after the war's end, in October, 1865.³²

Lincoln managed in Hovey's small case to put his house in order. The political-military game was not always equitable, logical, or even sensible. Many men played it well and emerged successful citizen soldiers. Many others, such as Hovey, found the system dysfunctional and left it embittered. After the publication of Sherman's memoirs, Hovey complained that the general did not mention his inconsequential part in the battle of Resaca. Sherman had ignored his "brilliant and effective charge," which had no equal "in the pages of history," and Hovey could not un-

³² Hovey to Thomas, September 8, 1864, *Official Records*, Vol. XXXIX, Part 1, pp. 465-66; Special Orders No. 170, Northern Department, August 25, 1864, *ibid.*, Part 2, p. 303; Heitman, *Historical Register*, I, 545.

derstand why his superior had “thought proper to deprive me of a part of my Indiana troops.”³³ Hovey’s rewards had not kept pace with his ambition, and a good field commander and vigorous supporter of the war effort developed into a carping and inefficient leader fit only for administrative work. Hovey went on to become a successful postwar politician in Indiana, but he never forgot the political defeats he suffered as a citizen soldier.

³³ Walker, *Hovey and Chase*, 116.