

7 Reasons Ulysses S. Grant Was One of America's Most Brilliant Military Leaders

What he lacked in knowledge of military art and science, he made up for with tenacity and grit.

In March 1864, Ulysses S. Grant went to Washington, D.C., to receive his commission from Abraham Lincoln as lieutenant general in command of all the Union armies. After several years of frustration with a parade of unsuitable commanders, the president had finally found the man who would defeat Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and thus effectively end the Civil War. The choice was surprising to many who had known Grant in former days. Ten years before, in April 1854, Captain Grant had submitted his resignation under a cloud.

In one of history's unexpected developments, the military profession Grant "had always disliked," in the words of his biographer Bruce Catton, ultimately "turned out to be the calling made for him." How did an ambivalent soldier who had been away from the army for several years—and who had drifted during that interval from one civilian occupation to another in search of elusive success—end up leading a vast force to victory and saving the Union?

Grant's predecessors in command of the Union Army were far more accomplished in military art and science. Winfield Scott, whose experience dated back to the War of 1812, had led the army since 1841. George B. McClellan, who replaced the aging Scott early in the Civil War, was an able administrator who organized the Army of the Potomac. In the 1850s, McClellan had studied the Crimean War at first hand as a member of an official delegation of American observers. Henry W. Halleck, the author of *Elements of Military Art & Science*, was regarded as a master theoretician