

## **Interrogating a ‘conspiracy’:**

*About that Civil War press ‘boycott’ of General Meade*

### **Abstract**

In the midst of the Civil War’s bloody Overland campaign in 1864, General George Meade, commander of the federal Army of the Potomac, ordered the humiliating punishment of a war correspondent accused of writing “wicked” lies about the general. The correspondent, Edward Crapsey of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, was expelled after being paraded through army lines wearing placards that said: “Libeler of the Press.” In collective retaliation, Northern newspapers supposedly imposed a news blackout of Meade. He purportedly was written out of news reports about his army. This paper interrogates the evidence about the supposed conspiracy against Meade and finds that accounts of a boycott were not contemporaneous with Crapsey’s humiliation: Those accounts emerged years later. The paper also notes that newspaper correspondents were noticeably ignoring Meade *before* Crapsey’s punishment. Claims of a press conspiracy to protest Meade’s treatment of Crapsey are, the paper concludes, highly suspect and likely specious.

Submitted by:

**W. Joseph Campbell**, PhD

Professor

School of Communication

American University

4400 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20016-8017

<wjc@american.edu>

202.885.2071