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Peculiar Defeat:
Warfare and the Confederate Culture of Invincibility

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ABSTRACT

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Located at the crossroads of cultural, military, and southern history, this dissertation uncovers the cultural values, wartime perspectives, and psychological constructions that convinced many Confederate soldiers they would win the American Civil War. A host of elements, including evangelical religion, abstractions of the enemy, disorienting combat conditions, wishful rumors, and masculine ideals, sustained troop morale by promising ultimate victory in return for endurance against worsening circumstances. Using soldiers’ letters and diaries written during the war’s final sixteen months (January 1864–May 1865), this study shows how the cognitive and emotional supports for Rebels’ confidence withstood successive setbacks but ultimately collapsed when events impinged upon their reality and ended the world they fought for. In addition to soldiers’ writings, the sources range from camp songs and cartoons to sermons and editorials. This work also applies sociological theories on the spread of rumors to recapture the troops’ perceptions and borrows psychological premises about cognitive
dissonance to discern how troops received and adjusted to surrender. Looking beyond the 
Civil War, this thesis informs scholarship on masculinity, nationalism, Reconstruction, 
and postwar memory. The seeds of postwar defiance and Lost Cause mythology 
germinated in Rebels’ experiences as hardened soldiers who had convinced themselves 
they could not be conquered by northerners and blacks. Faith in the invincibility of their 
arms, valor, and cause—convictions seared into the mentalities of thousands of white 
southern men during their formative years—did not die with surrender but shaped their 
peculiar postwar identity as unconquered losers. Undaunted by capitulation, white 
southern men continued their military struggle in the social and political theaters of 
Reconstruction.
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Chapter One

The Problem of Defeat in Southern Memory and Civil War History

In *Intruder in the Dust*, William Faulkner wrote that every southern boy of

fourteen imagines:

The instant when it’s still not yet two o’clock on that July
afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the
rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the
furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett
himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand
probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting
for Longstreet to give the word and it’s all in the balance, it
hasn’t happened yet, it hasn’t even begun yet, it not only hasn’t
begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin against that
position and those circumstances which made more men than
Garnett and Kemper and Armstead and Wilcox look grave yet
it’s going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with
too much at stake and that moment doesn’t need even a fourteen-
year-old boy to think *This time. Maybe this time* with all this
much to lose and all this much to gain.

But Faulkner, the fourteen-year-old, and the reader know that Pickett’s Charge broke in
blood on Cemetery Ridge. The thought of being at Gettysburg with the mile-long line of
Confederates just before they step out from the tree line evokes the loss that haunts white
southern memory. Knowing the war’s outcome, we feel drawn to that moment when “it’s
all in the balance,” just before the cataclysm ended white southerners’ dream of
independence and answered black southerners’ prayers for freedom. Some Americans are
so captivated by this cognizance of the war’s ending that they outdo Faulkner’s
imagination and literally reenact decisive battles like Gettysburg with excruciating detail.
The consciousness of Confederate failure—the awareness that one South died and
another was born—gives the Civil War a sense of timeless tragedy that attracts millions
of readers and tourists. As Robert Penn Warren explained during the war’s centennial, "the Civil War is our felt history—history lived in the national imagination."

But knowing the war’s outcome separates us from those who fought it and hampers our efforts to understand them. Unlike Faulkner or the reenactors, General Pickett’s men did not know they faced a turning point of the war on July 3, 1863. The imminent doom that colors our view of the war was absent from their perspective. During the final sixteen months of the war (January 1864–April 1865) countless Confederates expressed confidence in ultimate victory despite Gettysburg and other major setbacks. In January 1864 Sergeant Rawleigh Downman wrote his wife:

I think there is a great deal of useless and uncalled for despondency in the country. It is very true that we have met with some serious reverses this past fall, but we should be thankful that we have been enabled to get through the year at all without being overwhelmed. We have survived the mightiest efforts of one of the most powerful nations in the world & I can see no reason why, if we are but true to ourselves, we cannot resist them another year equally as well. All we want is nerve to stand up amid difficulties and a determination to succeed and by the help of God we shall succeed.

In March 1864 Sergeant Reuben Pierson thought the health and morale of the Army of Northern Virginia were “unsurpassed by any band of soldiers that history either modern or ancient give an account of.” He told his sister that the veterans were “eager for the opening of the spring campaign in the full belief that we will be blessed with some grand and glorious victories.” As late as January 1865, William Nugent believed “it is not now too late to remedy our losses” and hoped “the day star of our Independence will soon dawn.” Comments like these, however dissonant they seem from historical hindsight, pervade soldiers’ diaries and letters.
Historians have identified Confederate confidence late in the war but have not studied it closely for a number of reasons. As in southern culture and the national imagination, Civil War history has focused on the war’s outcome. Starting with Appomattox in mind, generations of historians have debated the primary Union strength or Confederate flaw that decided the contest. The prominence of this discourse is evident in four books entitled, Why The North Won the Civil War (1960), How the North Won the Civil War (1983), Why the South Lost the Civil War (1986), and Why the Confederacy Lost (1992). These volumes often overlook Rebels’ persistent faith in success, because the soldiers’ convictions undermine arguments that stress loss of will as a n ingredient of Confederate failure. Moreover, positive Rebel statements late in the war seem false or delusional in retrospect. As a result, scholars have dismissed Confederate hopes as “insane Confederate optimism” or “unrealistic bravado” — terms that describe and judge the mentality from today’s perspective rather than explaining it within the soldiers’ world. Historian John Shy identified similar cases of “anachronistic distortion” in scholarship on the Revolutionary War: “the temptation to read our own knowledge of outcomes back into the words and sentences of people who did not know the outcome of their situation seems almost irresistible; once we spot the glimpse of the future in the historical document, we are very likely to twist the meaning present in the writer’s mind at the time he wrote.”

To counter the effects of hindsight and allow for Rebel optimism, my work shifts the question from Why the Confederacy lost? To Why did it last as long as it did? Numerous setbacks and symptoms of defeat plagued the nation’s final years. During 1864–1865, class conflict, inflation, mal-administration of government, and the
disintegration of slavery internally weakened the Rebellion. Meanwhile, massive, well-equipped Federal armies, a strangling blockade, the determined leadership of Lincoln and his generals, and the unwillingness of France and Great Britain to ally with the Rebels doomed the Confederacy from without. Despite these conditions, many factors contributed to Confederate persistence, including weaponry that favored the defensive, the vast expanse of the South, Rebel generalship, and the veteran character of Confederate soldiers—their fortitude, solidarity, and faith in victory. While thousands of Rebel troops died or deserted, thousands more remained in the ranks to the bitter end. Inertia played a part in their persistence, and for some, leaving the army would have been more difficult than staying. But those who endured expressed confidence in ultimate triumph and gave a host of tangible and abstract reasons for their faith. In the end, these influences convinced many Confederates they were not only unconquered but unconquerable.⁴

Because this dissertation explicates Rebel notions of invincibility, it confronts a second obstacle to understanding history, namely the allure of moral judgement. If our knowledge of outcomes tempts us to read the present into the past, our disagreement with the Confederates’ cause entices us to criticize rather than explain their convictions. Fortunately American society has transformed itself to the point that a war for secession and slavery remains popular with only bumper sticker manufacturers and fringe groups. But moral sensitivity has increased with civic growth, and a scholar who presents Confederate views runs the risk of being labeled a neo-Confederate or racist. One noted historian of the Confederacy has gone so far as to announce he is from Los Angeles and lacks a Civil War ancestor I order to avoid possible censure. Scholars of southern
intellectual life have faced and overcome the same challenge. Michael O’Brien’s work has permitted southern culture “to define its own terms” without favoring or castigating it. As Drew Faust has noted, “the judgmental—even condemnatory—approach in many earlier explorations of southern thought has been replaced by an effort to trace the connections between expressed beliefs and the regional way of life.” Perhaps Robert Brugger put it best: “this generation’s scholars are dedicated to trying to understand how southern thought was ‘thinkable’ instead of simply dismissing it as ‘astonishing’ or ‘irrational.’” Likewise my work attempts to show how soldiers’ notions of being unconquerable were “thinkable” and not just products of mass delusion or denial.5

Using hundreds of letters and diaries written by soldiers in 1864–1865, this dissertation uncovers the wartime perspectives, cultural values, and psychological constructions that convinced many Rebels they could win independence. This focus narrows the source material in two ways. First, in order to explain a wartime mentality, I ignored evidence available in postwar memoirs and regimental histories. Though these records provide descriptive accounts, their authors rely on memory and—to an extent far greater than wartime writings—they speak with an audience in mind. As writer William Maxwell explained, memory “is really a form of storytelling that goes on continually in the mind and often changes with the telling Too many conflicting emotional interests are involved for life ever to be wholly acceptable, and possibly it is the work of the storyteller to rearrange things so that they conform to this end. In any case, in talking about the past we lie with every breath we draw.” In short, postwar accounts cannot answer wartime questions. Second, by centering the inquiry on 1864–1865, this work studies a period when the volume of testimony was most affected by casualties, war
shortages, unreliable mail service, and the acceleration of military campaigns. This problem is most acute for the final operations of 1865. For example, few of General Robert E. Lee's men had the time or means to record their observations during the critical period from the evacuation of Richmond on April 2, 1865 to the surrender at Appomattox a week later. To compensate for this documentary silence, I included accounts soldiers wrote a month or two later when the tenor and content of their writing "rind true." This was a judgment call I preferred not to make, but the available evidence offered few options.6

Despite these source restrictions, this dissertation enjoys an embarrassment of riches when compared to the evidence available to scholars of other wars, cultures, and eras. Over 750,000 men fought for the Confederacy and more than 80 percent of them were literate. By writing to loved ones and keeping copious diaries, Rebels and their Union counterparts left behind more written evidence than exists from soldiers of any previous conflict. Moreover, their records compare favorably to documents from twentieth-century wars, because unlike troops from these later struggles, Civil War soldiers encountered no government censors. They could and did reveal their hopes and fears, speculate about the coming campaign and the war's conclusion, express their motives for fighting and enduring, and criticize any one and any thing. Archives, historical societies, universities, and libraries preserve thousands of these letters and diaries, and books and journals have published hundreds of the better collections to accommodate scholars and a substantial reading public. Enough primary evidence exists for a lifetime of work.7
By including the accounts of troops and officers from across the Confederacy, this dissertation uses rich evidence to compare the experiences and perspectives of diverse soldiers in disparate locations. Surprisingly, I found no distinction between the convictions and knowledge of enlisted men and officers. Privates and colonels shared similar mentalities of being unconquerable, and neither rank seemed better prepared for defeat. In part, the pervasiveness of the culture of invincibility explains this phenomena. But the style of command also melded the mentalities of troops and leaders. Civil War officers marched, camped, fought, and died beside their men in a manner that was less common in other American wars. For these reasons, and because titles clutter prose, I have often omitted soldiers’ ranks from the narrative.

This work also contrasts Rebels in three groups: the Army of Northern Virginia which defended Richmond, the Army of Tennessee which fought General William T. Sherman’s force in Tennessee, Georgia, and the Carolinas, and the Army of the Trans Mississippi which opposed Federal troops west of the river. Here I discovered significant variance in opinion but also uncovered striking similarities in the attitudes of Confederates who fought from Virginia to Texas. The text explores these comparisons in depth. I favored “representative” voices of infantrymen, cavalrymen, and artillermen who fought in these three main theaters over accounts written by Confederates whose war service was more unique or unfortunate, such as partisan guerrillas, sailors, and prisoners of war. Adding these latter viewpoints threatened to turn an already diverse discourse into a cacophony. Finally, it is worth noting that I found no divergence between the content of diaries and letters—the opinions soldiers confessed in private writings also appear in letters to loved ones. Likewise the tone of correspondence addressed to men, women, and
children is similar if not indistinguishable, because troops often meant their letters for the eyes and ears of everyone back home.

Rather than follow the war's final years chronologically, each chapter corresponds to an element that Rebels used to bolster their faith in Confederate victory and invincibility. Chapter two shows how religious beliefs, particularly the convictions that God controlled history and favored the Confederates, convinced thousands of soldiers that the divine would providentially deliver them independence when the time was right. This chapter reminds us that spirituality permeated nineteenth-century life and shaped most Americans' worldview. Chapter three explores how abstractions of the enemy influenced soldiers' images of the war and its likeliest outcomes. By underestimating or barbarizing the Union, Rebels envisioned a foe that was too inept or too evil to win the conflict. Taken together, chapters two and three demonstrate that Confederates pictured themselves and their adversaries in Manichean terms that left no doubt as to which side was right and thus deserving of triumph in a world ordered by God.

Chapters four and five shift the focus from conceptions of belligerents to views of the war. Chapter four explores how soldiers remained confident of success within their immediate surroundings. This chapter illustrates that comradeship, disorienting combat conditions, and the spectacle of Confederate numbers on parade grounds and enemy corpses on battlefields, assured many Rebels that they were holding their own against great but surmountable odds. Chapter five examines how troops used rumors and news from distant theaters, the North, and overseas, to grasp the whole war. Wishful hearsay, irresponsible media coverage, and propaganda combined to present a portrait of the
conflict that was rosier than the truth but just as believable within the soldiers' world. Chapters four and five combine to show how chaotic and ambiguous warfare can appear to those who wage it.

Chapters six and seven illustrate how these cognitive and emotional supports for Rebels' confidence withstood successive setbacks but ultimately collapsed when events impinged upon their reality and ended the world they fought for. Chapter six covers the final campaigns of 1865 and the surrenders. Here we see how the influences examined in previous chapters continued to affect soldiers' mentalities up to and even past capitulation. Chapter seven briefly sketches Confederates' homeward journeys, considers the long-term impact of Rebel notions of invincibility, and compares the Confederate experience to other cultural reactions to defeat.

This dissertation contributes to Civil war scholarship, American history, and war studies in ways that general readers might want clarified before I begin. For studies of the War and warfare in general, my work adds soldiers' faith—whether it be faith in their God, in their armies, in their people, or in ultimate success—as a factor in troop morale. Most Civil War historians ask "what they fought for" when exploring motivations, and most agree that Confederates struggled for their people and principles. Protecting loved ones at home and comrades in the ranks steeled Rebel resolve. Believing that their cause was just and that duty bound them to persist also motivated them. But explaining why thousands of men continued to fight for cause and comrades despite the long odds of 1864 and 1865 requires a different approach. Instead of asking what they fought for, we must explain why they fought on. Historian Reid Mitchell understood this problem when he asked, "Why did the Confederate soldiers continue to give their loyalty to the army
and government at Richmond long after victory could be expected?" I am convinced that thousands of soldiers protracted the war not in spite of their knowledge of imminent doom, but because they still expected to win. War tests all its participants, and some expend faith in victory before others do. In the Confederate ranks, those who lost all hope most likely deserted—and thousands did so in the last months of the war. Those who remained to the end of the conflict often exhibited an undying faith in their success, even a sense that they and their country were unconquerable. This mentality helps to explain why wars seldom end when the outcome seems inevitable in hindsight: the momentum of warfare lives in the hearts and minds of eventual losers who do not fathom defeat.⁸

Finally, a quest for meaning, both emotional and cognitive, produced Rebel notions of being invincible. Explaining this search for significance during the war requires both a backward glance into antebellum cultural influenced and a forward gaze into its enduring postwar legacy. In other words, the soldiers’ perspectives, like many aspects of the Civil War, lack relevance until we look beyond the traditional boundaries of military history. Raimondo Luraghi put it best when he argued:

Military problems, if studied in a vacuum, do not make much sense. War is the hardest test to which a given society is subjected. Every society meets this challenging strain in a way that is directly linked to its social, moral, ethical—in other words, its cultural—scale of values. Consequently, we could say that any people are led, both politically and militarily, in the way “the deserve” to be; or less drastically, that any society wages its own peculiar kind of warfare.

As Luraghi suggests, Confederates not only defended a “peculiar institution” but fought and thought of warfare in peculiar ways. By recapturing their mentality, we see southern culture as a continuum, rather than a succession of Old South, Confederacy, and New South, and we recover how a generation of veterans lived through all three eras and
strove to maintain their values and identity within the crucible of war, emancipation, and reunion.⁹
1 William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (New York, 1948), 194–95; Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York, 1961), 4. An explanation for terminology is necessary before I begin. Throughout this work, I use the terms Confederacy and Rebel, and Confederacy and Rebellion, interchangeably. Confederate and Confederacy are the most accurate and neutral terms for the people and nation that seceded from and fought against the Union. Rebel and Rebellion are less accurate and neutral, because they reflect the Union opinion that Confederates were committing treason by rebelling against Federal authority. However, both Rebel and Rebellion were widely accepted by Confederates, so I use them here as the most suitable synonyms. I capitalize both words in order to differentiate Rebels and the Rebellion of 1861–1865 from other rebels and rebellions throughout history, just as historians capitalize Populists/Populism and Progressives/Progressivism to delineate a particular group and movement from others. Most importantly, I have not used the words southerner or South to depict Confederates and their nation, because these terms ignore the millions of black southerners who contested the Confederate cause. When we consider “the South” equivalent to “the Confederacy”, we unwittingly perpetuate a conception of the region and its people as white. Though Confederates fostered this illusion in their writing, we should not do so in our prose. I am reminded of a story Vernon Burton once told me. Burton, a native South Carolinian, stood before an audience of fellow South Carolinians and informed them that their state actually won the Civil War, because the majority of South Carolina’s population then and now is African American. The audience’s reaction was tepid at best.


will the war end?, What is the enemy doing?, How will this battle conclude?, and Will I survive?

4 I owe John Coski credit for raising the problem of inertia at the 2002 Southern Intellectual Historians Circle Conference at the University of Richmond.


6 Another questionable source I included was William Heartsill’s diary that is published in Bell Irvin Wiley, ed., Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army (Jackson, Tenn., 1954). Heartsill printed his own diary after the war and gave copies to friends and relatives. I trust Bell Wiley’s assertion that Heartsill’s published work does not differ significantly from his manuscript, because Wiley examined both sources.


9 Raimondo Luragi, The Rise and Fall of the Plantation South (New York and London, 1978), 5. “Peculiar institution” is a common euphemism for slavery and was the title of Kenneth M. Stampp’s, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York, 1956). For other scholarship that explores how Confederate warfare accorded with
Chapter Two

The Smile of Providence: Confederate Religion and Invincibility

"The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of men as they stand before death." Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy., 51.¹

"Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me again from the depths of the earth. . . . For thou art my hope, O Lord God; Thou art my trust from my youth." Verses from Psalm 71 quoted in Samuel Horace Hawes's diary, February 12, 1865.²

The Ambiguous Gifts of Confederate Religion

Moments when people encounter mortality or when societies confront crises reveal the strength of religious beliefs. With death pervasive and anomic on all sides, the crucible of war may be the ultimate test of a peoples' spirituality. In the American Civil War Confederates lofted banners of faith for all to see. Their beliefs graced government documents, filled newspaper columns, accented military reports, and enriched the diaries and correspondence of thousands. A host of influences, including the tenor of antebellum southern evangelicalism, the government's uses of Christianity, and the encompassing presence of spirituality in the armies, convinced many Rebel soldiers that God favored their cause and would deliver them victory. Even in the final months of the struggle, soldiers displayed remarkable confidence that the Almighty would save them from ruin if they fulfilled their obligations to Him, if they upheld their covenant.³

By assuring them that God blessed the Confederacy, religion fostered a strong expectation of victory—even a mentality of being unconquerable—among many Rebels. This belief that they were on the winning side of Providence colored Confederates' perceptions of the military situation and delayed if it did not prevent realization by its most stalwart defenders of the Rebellion's eventual fate. While confidence in ultimate
triumph was a reason in itself for soldiers to adopt Confederate religion, the men sought Christianity because it bestowed two invaluable gifts: an explanatory system to make sense of the war and a code of behavior to guide them past the temptations of camp and the perils of combat. Secular institutions rivaled but seldom matched these gifts.

Thousands of men carried southern evangelicalism with them to war and, thus, intuitively gained its worldview of the conflict. Thousands more “found religion” after encountering carnage and, thus, acquired the belief system to overcome terror and maintain reality. By 1864–1865 Rebel armies were perhaps the most religious legions ever assembled on American soil.

Through the final months of the struggle, countless Confederate letters and diaries reveal continued faith in God’s favor and Providence. On Christmas Day 1864 Edward Crenshaw sat in his winter quarters hoping for holiday joy or “good news from our armies to cheer me.” None came. “But the blessed thought that God, in his infinite mercy, gave his only begotten son as an atonement for our sins, cheers me and gives me new life.” “I will not despair when we have such a God to aid us,” Crenshaw reasoned, “for he has said that he will protect the weak and aid those who are deserving and he will hear the prayers of those who call him in an humble and contrite spirit. — He will do what is best for us; his will will be done and not that of our enemies.” Crenshaw did not fathom that God’s will could correspond to northern war aims. In a letter to his father, Reuben Pierson bluntly expressed his confidence in God’s favor: “while we . . . fight in a holy and just cause we need have no fears of being enslaved by so brutal and cruel enemies as those against whom we are fighting.” According to Pierson, “God who rules the destiny of all things and is a God of wisdom and of justice will never suffer a determined and
Christian people to be overcome by a cruel Tyrant but will be their deliver[er] as in the
days of old.” Pierson reasoned that a God who led “the children of Israel dry-shod
through the Red Sea” could and would find a way to give the Confederacy its
independence.  

In the end Confederate religion yielded equivocal results. On the one hand,
spirituality offered the men immeasurable benefits. Christianity countered the fear of
death, promoted discipline and morality, relieved the stresses of combat and fatigue,
encouraged primary group cohesion, and alleviated boredom. Rituals of faith connected
thousands of soldiers to peaceful memories and loved ones who were simultaneously
worshiping back home. On the other hand, religion prolonged and intensified the conflict.
Ministers and civic leaders quoted Scripture to justify warfare. Many even encouraged
increased destruction and carnage as a purge for national sins. Because the religious code
of behavior for many white southerners equated fighting for the Confederacy to doing
God’s work, Christianity encouraged thousands of devout Rebels to stay in the ranks
despite increased hardships and mounting death tolls. In the end, thousands of
southerners convinced themselves that only God could conquer them, and He was their
greatest ally. Ironically, while praying to their prince of peace Confederates developed a
mentality that extended the suffering of millions.  

Antebellum Religious Inheritances

The conviction that God favored their cause and would providentially deliver them independence continued to hearten many Rebels in the final months of the war, in part, because the roots of these thoughts were deeply imbedded in southern religion and the American mind. Three developments in antebellum religion particularly influenced this wartime belief: the growth and separation of evangelical Protestant denominations in the South, antebellum clerics’ support of slavery and disunion, and the millennialism of American civil religion. In all three elements, southern identity gravitated toward God and away from the North. This heavenly focus raised Confederates’ perceptions of their country and cause to a sacred level. In other words, many soldiers continued to expect ultimate triumph, because their religion conceived the South as divinely chosen for greatness.6

Facing failure and desolation in South Carolina, Richard Furman tried to reassure himself that “as the Lord is great in his Mercies, we are thereby encouraged to hope.” Furman braced himself against a grave future with the conviction that “God has promised Strength equal to the Day of Trial,” and commensurate to the challenge, “so will the Glory and Joy of Victory be to the faithful soul.” In Kentucky, James Smith found similar comfort in God’s promise of providential deliverance: “‘the Lord hath his way in the wilderness and all things obey his might.’ I trust he will yet bring good out of this evil.”7

Furman and Smith were not writing about the ravages of war and the Rebellion’s need for divine aid; the failure they feared was an irreligious South, and the bleakness they encountered was the ungodly landscape of the region in the 1790s, not the charred fields of the Confederacy in the 1860s. Similarities between the ministers’ language and
Confederates’ religious utterances illustrate that wartime spirituality owed much to antebellum, evangelical inheritances. Views and practices central to Confederate religion first became popular in the South during the Great Revival of 1800–1805. In the final months of the Civil War, Rebels still saw the conflict through a spiritual framework strikingly similar to the worldview of Richard Furman and other turn-of-the-century southern clerics. These connections confirm that Confederate religion was more than useful propaganda or wartime delusions fabricated by a people unwilling to accept defeat. Confederate religion was the society’s reflexive use of its traditional beliefs when it needed them most.

The South had missed the Great Awakening that transformed and expanded religion in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts during the 1730s and 1740s. Victory over Great Britain raised southern evangelicals’ hopes that their denominations, unlike the Anglican Church, would profit from their heritage as outlawed, dissenting churches that had rallied to the patriots’ cause. Instead, the first decades of the republic brought spiritual decline. Fewer southern men joined the clergy. The region seemed more interested in expanding its physical boundaries than its spiritual awareness. Empty pews attested to the depopulation of the East as families trekked to Kentucky and Tennessee. Coming at a time when churchmen anticipated growth, this depression hit hard.⁸

How southern Christians perceived this secular winter and hoped for a brighter future exhibits important parallels to Confederate religiosity. Living in a time when the populace lacked both scientific explanations for natural calamities and social theories for the rise of secularism, turn-of-the-century Christians accepted sacred answers for the otherwise inexplicable changes in their environment. They calmed their apprehensions
with the faith that an omnipotent deity controlled all their affairs. Just as no soul could avoid God’s judgment, nothing God created was beyond His command. Scripture described how minute divine care was; He controlled the falling of sparrows and numbered the hairs on human heads. On a daily basis God directed the course of nature, people, and civilizations. Using this system of thought, Richard Furman and his fellow Christians reasoned that God not only knew of religion’s waning in the South, He was using it for some higher purpose.⁹

But why would their Maker sanction religious depression? Churchmen answered that God allowed Christianity’s decline in order to show southerners the shallowness and futility of a society separated from Him. In their view, the Almighty would revive spirituality in the South after the populace recognized the dangers of their religious estrangement and repented their sins. In other words, if God wanted to teach southerners how worthless life was without Him, the poor state of southern religion would improve when Christians learned the lesson and sought reconciliation. The process of change for the entire section was envisioned as the path of an individual’s conversion magnified. Clergy imagined that God would respond to the South’s penitence with an intense and widespread religious revival that would contrast in goodness the evil of the spiritual void. What was once a place of iniquity would become God’s chosen land. Where there was spiritual darkness for decades, there would now be sacred light. The South’s turning toward God would be a blessed example for the world.¹⁰

The evangelicals’ perspective, however, minimized human responsibility for problems and solutions in significant ways. Congregations could pray for renewed awareness of God and address the sins that might have caused their current dilemma, but
the situation was permitted by their Maker and would be rectified by Him alone.

Christians infused the past, present, and future of the South with a celestial presence that trumped human agency. If a heavenly force governed the universe with minute management, individuals – indeed entire nations – were pawns in God’s march through time. The belief in Providence, or the idea that God directed history towards a moral finale, assured Christians that their suffering was meaningful and finite, but it also entrusted outcomes to God and marginalized people as witnesses who, at best, sustained hope, prayed for deliverance, and sought signs of God’s work.¹¹

Southern churches, nevertheless, did not idly wait for deliverance. Believing that Christians had a covenant relationship with their Maker, clergymen stressed to their congregations that God would bless them with a religious revival if they fulfilled their duties to Him. To elicit God’s mercy and forgiveness, thousands of southerners fasted and prayed. Dating back to Old Testament times, the fasting ritual was a public confession and transformation that symbolized the discarding of sinful living in favor of a higher, holier existence. For centuries church leaders had called for fast days and on them exhorted people to forsake worldliness if they wished to see God. Prayer represented a direct admittance of one’s dependence upon the Creator. Throughout the region, churches and their denominational authorities repeated these acts of humiliation to elicit God’s help.¹²

By openly addressing the spiritual decline and seeking reconciliation, southern clergy not only informed believers how serious the declension was but also planted the seed of hope that a great revival would come with divine forgiveness. But expectation alone could not ignite widespread religious awakening. As John Boles has noted, “only in
areas where there is a network of churches and a community of believers, where there exists a widely accepted set of beliefs about how God works in history to effect the redemption of humankind, and where there is a strong sense of social and cultural crisis that can easily be interpreted by contemporaries as susceptible solely to a religious resolution—only when these preconditions are met is a notable revival possible." In the first decade of the nineteenth century, these circumstances finally pervaded the South, and a long-awaited awakening shook the region.  

The Great Revival of 1800–1805 evangelized the South and "southernized" evangelical Christianity. In massive, outdoor meetings southerners released pent-up emotions and expectations. Under the heavens they constructed a "sacred canopy" to enclose their culture and infuse it with spiritual answers. But as more slaveholders and their bondsmen "found religion" in biracial churches, southern clergy found themselves forced to either champion the institution or jeopardize their standing in society. Developments within and outside the region made the decision an easy one for most southern clergymen. During the ensuing decades, membership in Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches grew faster than the total population, and evangelical Protestantism in general became orthodox throughout the land. While northern evangelicals faced challenges from Catholicism, the varied beliefs of immigrants, and secular "isms," southern Christians marveled at their prosperity and unity. Unconsciously at first, southern church leaders and their congregations began to regard their spiritual growth (and economic prosperity) as signs of divine favor. They reasoned that God must approve of their religious practices and social institutions—why else had He blessed their region
with a miraculous revival, years of rising spirituality, and significant economic prosperity?  

Nebulous assumptions about the South’s special place in God’s heart crystallized in the ensuing sectional debates over slavery. By attacking the morality of slaveowners and their society, abolitionists struck a blow not only at the peculiar institution but also at southerners’ claims to divine favor. Northern radicals described the South as brutish, sinful, lazy, and aristocratic, terms antithetical to how southern Christians saw themselves and their culture. Throughout the region evangelicals responded with ironclad Scriptural defenses of human bondage that compared southern practices to those of the Israelites and the prophets. The particulars of proslavery doctrine do not concern us here; what matters is how evangelicals used the exchange with abolitionists to distance their society from the North and connect it to God’s ways as they interpreted them. Church leaders’ defense of slavery and the South was not only a “gospel of disunion” but also a seed of the unconquerable mentality. By contending that southern culture enjoyed divine sanction, evangelicals attempted to place it beyond the reach of mortal criticism and vilify its enemies as infidels and apostates who challenged God’s order. This was their direct intention and the immediate impact of their efforts in the South. Indirectly and over time, their assertion of divine favor encouraged the conviction that God would protect southern society from all perils.  

Decades of sectional arguments continued to polarize the country and expand southerners’ perceptions about their society and its place in history. This trend accelerated with the denominational schisms of Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches. Splitting ostensibly over slavery in 1837, 1844, and 1845, southern
evangelicals worked to convince themselves and their congregations that God ordained the split and favored them over their northern brethren. On one level clergy were consciously striving for legitimacy after the sectional rending of religion. On another level, the prosperity of southern religion and society in general after the denominational breaks encouraged the conviction that God blessed the South regardless of whether clerics sought validation or not.¹⁶

Though it is tempting to stop here and attribute the South’s belief in divine favor to the origins of southern evangelicalism, religious proslavery doctrines, and the denominational schisms, a fourth influence anteceded and helped to foster these developments: the millennialism of American civil religion. Since the Revolution, church figures and lay people North and South had combined the Puritan faith that Pilgrims founded a New Israel with the republican ideology that the young nation represented humanity’s greatest experiment in government. The result was a civil millennialism that sanctified the United States’ place in the divine plan for history. In 1847 Reverend William Anderson Scott of New Orleans succinctly outlined America’s Providential pedigree: “God has a great design for this Continent and for our generation. As the Jews of old – as the Apostles – as the Reformers – as our fathers of 1776 – so are we, as a race, and as a nation, a peculiar people and called to a high and glorious destiny.” That destiny, according to the president of the University of Mississippi, was “the political regeneration of the whole human race.” As sectional tensions increased, many white southerners believed their region was fulfilling the American mission.¹⁷

Sacred and secular trends fostered the growth of civil religion throughout the antebellum decades. Typologies between America and biblical Israel were popular in
evangelical sermons. Most clergy shared an eschatology that supported millennial visions. Westward expansion, burgeoning nationalism, general prosperity, and widespread optimism encouraged notions of manifest destiny. Citizens and travelers distinguished the young nation from “decaying” Old World monarchies. With the birth of Mormonism, some Americans even contended that God had visited their land in biblical times. These trends coalesced into a national ethos that heralded the United States as the Redeemer Nation, the bearer of a new age of civilization. From the pulpit clergymen espoused this ethos by placing the country at the forefront of Providential designs.

The climate of antebellum southern religion, as outlined above, profoundly affected thousands of Confederate soldiers. Born during the Second Great Awakening, Rebel troops matured in a culture of religious intensity and contentiousness. For those who participated in the movement, the outer world was infused with a divine presence. Southern clerics professed time and again in revivals, denominational schisms, proslavery arguments, and civil millennialism that this presence favored the South. Regional prosperity, harmony in biracial churches, and the growth of southern religion were considered signs of Providence’s smile. Strikingly, many of the sacred practices and convictions Rebels carried in the trenches around Petersburg harkened back to the actions and words of Richard Furman and other turn-of-the-century evangelicals. When Christian Rebels espoused confidence that God favored them, they voiced a fundamental American belief.

Church Propaganda

When the war came, religious Confederates agreed that God’s hand created and shaped the struggle. Having used Providence to explain disparate events, including poor
and abundant crops, births and deaths, and religious declensions and revivals, it was
axiomatic that southerners would interpret the national contest as divinely ordained. As a
religious pamphlet that circulated through Confederate camps claimed, "the only proper
view of this Revolution, is that which regards it as the child of Providence." Devout
Rebels comprehended events through the interpretive prism of Scripture, like II
Chronicles 7:13,14, "The calamities and scourges which befall nations, are ordered by
and are under the control of an Allwise though mysterious Providence." Thomas S.
Dunaway used this Scripture in a sermon he delivered to Virginia Baptists in 1864. Elder
Dunaway admitted how hard it was to discern God's intentions for the war, but to deny
Providence "is to close the book of Revelation and plunge ourselves into inextricable
difficulties." Denying a divine presence in the contest "is simply to assume that God has
created a world of intelligent beings 'in his image and after his likeness,' and abandoned
them and given them up to their own government and delusions, while he continually
takes care of inanimate nature and governs the natural world by well-established laws."\(^{18}\)

By using Providence to explain the conflict, Confederates admitted a host of
related beliefs into their perspective on the war. If the struggle was an act of God, the
Confederacy's fate was ultimately beyond human agency. As a chaplain told his brigade,
"the Great God sits at the helm of the ship of war, to vindicate the doctrine that the battle
is His." Similar to evangelicals' perspectives in the 1790s, devout Rebels viewed the war
as an inevitable event and considered themselves pawns in a celestial plan. Moreover, a
belief in Providence did not permit accidents or fortune. Every effect had a cause, every
death served a purpose, and every victory or defeat meant something. Seeing the
Almighty directing the carnage helped Americans fathom the magnitude of the struggle, but it also averted the blame for deaths numbering in the hundreds of thousands.¹⁹

On 4 February 1863, a national day of Thanksgiving, Pastor William Rees examined this common conviction for his flock of Methodist Texans:

In the consideration of this subject, the Providence of God, we must guard, on the one hand, against the barren and icy rocks of Atheism, that would resolve God to a dead idealism, or inert abstraction; and, on the other, the wildfire and phosphoric corruscation of fanaticism, that would father on God all subjective vagaries of the enthusiastic day-dreamer.

Exhibiting the craft of a good sermonizer, Rees employed polar extremes—icy Atheism and fiery fanaticism—in order to locate his faith in Providence at the center of southern evangelicalism. Nevertheless, the pastor believed what he professed, and the starkness of his language illustrates how unquestioning southern faith was in God’s Providence.²⁰

During its short existence, Confederate religiosity evaded barren atheism with little effort; the challenge came from the flames of enthusiasm and fanaticism. Within the maelstrom of warfare, soldiers and civilians—even the South’s religious lights—got so caught up in the contest that they saw signs of God’s favor in the most minute, or gloomiest, circumstances. Kindled with antebellum assumptions and enflamed by wartime propaganda, the conviction that God favored the Confederate cause spread like wildfire and blazed throughout the final period of the conflict. If Pastor Rees could have distanced himself from the struggle at hand, he might have seen the phosphorescence of a volatile faith that “fathered on God all subjective vagaries.”

Many church leaders called for a national repentance to acquire divine favor. They averred that God controlled the war’s outcome and would deny the Rebellion
success until its people fulfilled their obligations to Him. “As all sources of good are at His disposal,” the Reverend J. L. Burrows warned in a sermon that was published for the troops, “so are all causes of evil.” Burrows explained that God controls “the demon of war” and “overrules the wrath of man so that it shall effect His purposes.” In short, without divine blessing, the Confederacy could expect not only the leveling consequences of Union victory but also the wrath of God. A Virginia Baptist cogently expressed the Confederacy’s alternatives: “With the smiles and approbation of God on our cause and country, no army, however numerous or powerful, can conquer us. On the other hand, no matter how weak our enemies, without His blessing we shall be overcome.” Only by “humbling ourselves and acknowledging our dependence on him” could Rebels gain divine approval and, thus, victory.\(^2\)

But during these days of high patriotism, calls for penitence and reform were less popular than nationalistic claims that the Rebellion had already secured divine sanction. For many southerners, impulses to legitimize the new government and justify the war merged with antebellum assumptions of regional sacredness to form an ironclad faith in God’s support. On a fast day devoted to humiliation, Reverend Joseph Atkinson told his North Carolinians that “a conflict waged in self-defense for all that man holds dear, and consecrated by the martyr-blood of the best men in these Confederate States – by the solemn voice of all our religious convocations, of all Christian churches and above all by the visible favor of Almighty Power, cannot but terminate happily.” Atkinson went further when he interpreted the ebb and flow of victories as signs of God’s intervention for the Rebellion. After reverses including the sinking of the Merrimac, the surrender of New Orleans, and the capture of Roanoke Island and Nashville, “when brought to the
lowest point of public depression and of conscious dependence, our deliverance was at hand.” According to Atkinson, during this nadir of Confederate fortunes, when McClellan’s massive army threatened Richmond, “God poured the spirit of dauntless heroism into the hearts of an whole people—soldiers, legislators, leaders, alike. If our eyes could have been unsealed during those seven days [before Richmond] . . . we should have seen an angel, terrible as that which smote the host of Sennacherib, hurling back the multitudinous cohorts of our self confident invaders, filling their ranks with confusion, dismay, and death.” Such a narrative did two things: it downplayed southern misfortunes by highlighting the peoples’ resolution, and it insinuated that God would not abandon his southern followers no matter how desperate the military situation.22

Widespread Confederate ideology and symbolism encouraged the conviction that the Rebellion followed Providential designs. From the war’s inception, Confederate institutions described themselves as uniquely sacred. Spiritual idioms permeated the discourse in legislative halls and military headquarters as well as chapels. While Confederate founders met in Montgomery, Alabama, Henry Timrod, the unofficial “Poet Laureate of the Confederacy,” penned these lines: “At last we are/ A nation among nations; and the world/ Shall soon behold in many a distant port/ Another Flag unfurled!/ Now, come what may, whose favor need we court?/ And, under God, whose thunder need we fear?/ Thank Him who placed us here/ Beneath so kind a sky.” Unlike the United States Constitution, the Confederate document explicitly mentioned God. The legislature placed the epigram “Deo Vindice” on the national seal. Throughout the war President Jefferson Davis proclaimed nine days of national prayer, thanksgiving, and fasting. Congress and state legislatures called for many more such occasions and on one of them
President Davis prayed, "that his sustaining grace be given to our people, and his Divine wisdom imparted to our rulers; that the Lord of Hosts will be with our armies, and fight for us against our enemies; and that he will graciously take our cause into his own hand and mercifully establish for us a lasting, just, and honorable peace and independence."23

Confederate clergy approved of this and wrapped their cause with the mantle of divine favor. As one minister exclaimed, "how fraught with thrilling incidents of Divine interposition, is the short, but eventful history of our government! In reviewing the past, let us thank God, and take courage." Shortly after Gettysburg, a chaplain reminded a brigade of Lee's men that "large armies and great powers do not always conquer the smaller and weaker. The Bible and history show that the reverse comes nearer being true." After recounting at length how Macedonians, Athenians, Romans, Englishmen, and Russians had beaten their enemies despite enormous odds, the chaplain addressed the history of his congregation. According to him, from Manassas to Gettysburg the Confederate army had always vanquished larger forces. As the chaplain put it, "often they have more than doubled you, and yet they have never beaten you. Under God you have always mastered the field." By this interpretation the history of Lee's army paralleled Biblical accounts of the Israelites' miraculous triumphs. Just as outnumbered forces led by Moses, Joshua, and Gideon slew thousands with the aid of divine power, Lee's men scattered the northern multitudes by God's blessing.24

Many prominent clerics drew explicit typologies between the Confederacy and biblical Israel. As one minister claimed, "David broke off from the first Israel under the reign of the house of Saul. . . . Davis broke off from the second kingdom of Israel under the reign of her first King, A. Lincoln, and established the second kingdom of
Jerusalem." The first chapter of Jeremiah was a popular choice of Scripture: "Then the Lord said unto me, out of the North an evil shall break forth upon the inhabitants of the land and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee." 25

As the war continued, clergy saw the Confederacy’s survival after successive Federal onslaughs as a sign of God’s help. The longer the Rebellion withstood the war storm, the more miraculous it seemed. In 1863 Bishop George F. Pierce described his young nation:

With her foot planted on the right and her trust in God, undismayed by numbers and armaments and navies, without the sympathy of the world, shut in, cut off, alone, she has battled through two long, weary years, gallantly, heroically, triumphantly, and today is stronger in men, resources, faith and hope than when Fort Sumter’s proud flag was lowered in her maiden arms. It is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

The following year Reverend D. S. Doggett remarked, "It is a fact of no small import, and of no little consolation, that a war-storm of three years' duration, has neither wrecked nor dismantled the goodly ship of our fortunes; but that she stands firmly, with her bow to the blast, gradually making her way to the harbor." Elliott concurred and echoed Pierce’s language: "we have assuredly had everything against us; numbers overwhelming, hate bitter and cruel, resources without stint, the command by our enemies of the ocean and the rivers, the ear of the world shut to us, the cry put upon us of slavery and barbarism. With all these things have we been contending for three weary years, through storm and sunshine, in cold and hunger and nakedness, creating as we fought, weeping while we labored, reaping courage and endurance from the fields sown
with the blood of our children, and yet through the mercy of God, we stand this day un conquered and defiant, looking to final success with as full assurance, as upon the day when we threw down the gauntlet under the walls of the ocean girdled Sumter.\textsuperscript{26}

Southern clergy supported the war effort with actions as well as words. At recruitment rallies, ministers connected Confederate military service to doing God’s work. When the men left for war, church leaders collected provisions for them and assisted their families. Religious organizations provided critical supplies and labor to hospitals. Hundreds of ministers joined the ranks as chaplains or fought as officers and common troops. Some churchmen expelled members of their congregation who withheld their sons from the draft or otherwise defied government directives.\textsuperscript{27}

Confederate religion reached the troops through chaplains’ sermons, military orders, government proclamations, family letters, and most voluminously through millions of pamphlets printed and circulated by the religious military press. Despite major challenges in financing, producing, and distributing, the religious military press poured a steady stream of sermons, reports, and stories that glorified the Confederate cause and its Christian soldiers until May 1865. Concerned with saving soldiers’ souls, the preachers-turned-editors of these papers also instilled confidence in the cause. “At first,” Kurt Berends explains, the editors “clearly differentiated between the cause of God and the cause for the South. But as time went on, it became increasingly difficult to tell the two apart.” Merging the causes “created a framework of beliefs – a worldview – that sustained an unvanquished optimism for southern independence.” Editors used Scripture to sanctify the Rebellion; compared northern and southern armies, societies, and churches; and fused civil liberty and religious freedom. In the end, millions of pamphlets
conflicted serving the Confederacy with following Christ, fighting Yankees with killing infidels, and winning independence with fulfilling Providential plans.28

*Religion in the Ranks and the Spectacles of Piety*

The religious worldview of Confederate soldiers attested to the strength of southern evangelicalism and the effectiveness of denominations’ war efforts. Faith in Providence and God’s blessing affected soldiers’ perspectives on many levels. Within their personal war of camping, marching, and fighting, confidence in God eased stress and explained hardships. Soldiers also used belief in divine favor to explain their army’s fortunes and to comprehend the prolonged revivals within the ranks. Beyond their immediate realm, soldiers drew upon assurances of divine aid to find silver linings in the news from distant campaigns and to promote an inextinguishable trust that they could not lose with God on their side.

Faith in Providence affected how many Rebels interpreted combat. Viewing themselves as God’s pawns produced a fatalistic conviction that surviving the struggle was beyond their control and in the hands of the One who oversaw the paths of bullets and the fates of men. Confederates used the mystery of Providence to explain how they had passed through the surrounding death of battles unscathed. After fighting at Burgess Mill in February 1865, Joseph Manson confided in his diary, “I am not able to express my gratitude to God for having covered our heads in the day of battle. His good providence has spared us a little longer whilst so many have been called away! . . . I commit all into the hands of Him who gave me my life & who will take it at the most appropriate time.” After Spottsylvania Court House, a hand-to-hand struggle of men in mud that affected the hardest veterans, Robert Stiles wrote home that, "Nothing but
God's Providence over us has shielded us from greater losses. . . . God has been very near to both of your boys I hope and believe darling Mother." Two weeks later Thomas Hampton wrote, "since the 7th of May 1864 we have passed through the severest scenes of wreaking war that can be Imagined in which I have been miraculously preserved in many cases with my Company for which I see the alwise providence of God demonstrated in evry days conflict."29

Devout Rebels were perhaps fatalists for accepting their status as pawns, but they also believed God protected the lowliest trooper who prayed with true reverence. Simple prayers like William Casey's "may God be my shield and protection in the day of a fight," enabled soldiers to entrust their fate to God and, thus, ease fears and anxieties concerning death. In October 1864 William Nugent admitted, "it is dreadful to contemplate the many, many dangers which continually surround us, and yet I do not feel alarmed, because my trust is in the Great Ruler of the Universe. In the midst of danger I feel a trust in a higher power that enables me to bear bravely up and I have a hope of getting safely through this pernicious war." After a fight, Robert Stiles wrote, "I trust He enabled me to do my duty on the field & certainly with greater composure than hitherto." John Cotton told his wife, "I dread this fite for I think the cavalry will have a heap to do and I dont no whether I will ever get out of it or not but I only have to trust to him who runs all things for my safety I hope he wil gide me safe threw the storms of battle and then return me safe home to you and our dear little ones."30

Some men were so convinced of a connection between personal piety and God's protection that they encouraged family members back home to also lead moral lives on their behalf. "Pray for me and tell every colored Christian on the land to do the same. But
do it in faith,” William Casey wrote his mother. “For it is writen in the fifth Chapter of James that, ‘The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.’”

Resolutions sent home by five Georgia brigades summed up soldiers’ requests:

We earnestly and sincerely request our friends in Georgia to remember us in all their supplications at a throne of grace: praying that we may be enabled to continue steadfast in the foregoing resolve; that we may secure, through Divine grace, the salvation of our souls; that God may preserve our lives through the coming campaign, nerve our arms in freedom’s contest, and crown our labors, privations, and toils, with Southern independence, peace, and prosperity.

Texas cavalryman Dunbar Affleck must have been comforted by his mother’s words:

“God has mercifully protected you through many dangers – and – He will again hear the prayers of your mother which daily ascend to His throne of Grace for your continued preservation from danger – moral as well as physical.” Likewise, Mary Downman reassured her husband that his safety was in her prayers: “I do pray so earnestly that your life may be precious in the sight of Our Father – it is so precious to me.”

Either for their own safety or the salvation of loved ones, soldiers evangelized to family members who lacked religion. When William Casey found religion, he hoped that his act “will be beneficial to the whole family,” including his brother in arms. In a letter to his mother, Casey wrote, “Give my best to Pa and tell him that I say that enough of his life has been already devoted to the world. Ask him for my sake to think of it[,] to ponder the question. But he is not yet too old to be good. I would almost as soon hear that Pa had become a Christian, as to hear that war had ended.” When Charles Fenton James learned that his sister attended dancing parties, he feared that her conduct would jeopardize God’s protection over him in battle. He wrote her a strong rebuke: “Suppose that while you
were upon the dancing floors, you were to hear that one or both of your brothers had fallen in some battle, what would be your feelings then? . . . And do you have any guarantee that such will not be the case when you go to the ball room?” James chastised Emma for neglecting her duty not only to God and her country but also to her brothers in uniform. In a world where God’s hand touched everything, a person’s conduct could have far-reaching consequences.  

Beyond their personal realm, many soldiers saw God empowering entire armies. Prayers for personal safety also contained supplications for their side in the struggle. “I had an anxious day,” Edgeworth Bird understated during the battle of the Wilderness. He prayed, “God bless our friends and watch over them tomorrow and give us a great and crowning victory.” Just as survival in contests like the Wilderness could seem divinely ordained, victories against great odds and within horrific maelstroms also appeared miraculous. At Resaca, Captain Samuel McKittrick noted, “the hand of God appeared to be signally on our side.” Having “just returned from another Battlefield that proved to be favourable to us,” Thomas Hampton explained, “under the divine protection of God we was victorious.” In the eyes of many Confederates, officers deserved praise for sound leadership and troops garnered respect for their courage, but God alone was the agent of triumph. Some Rebels assumed divine favor and the victories His blessings would bring. While he stood between William Sherman and Atlanta, Frank Batchelor assessed his army’s chances: “our Army is large, in good spirits, have all confidence in Genl Johnston, and looking to the God of battles feel assured of victory.” The same week William Nugent wrote his wife, “you may look out for rapid movements, startling
combinations, heavy fighting and a crushing defeat to the Yankee army by the blessing of a Good Providence.”

Rebels also often traced the will of God in reports they received from distant theaters. Reviewing engagements in early 1864, Thomas Goree pronounced, “God has certainly blessed our armies this year.” He explained, “whenever we have met the enemy -- in S.C., Fla., Miss, Tenn., Ky, Va., and N C., the victory has been ours, with apparently very little effort on our part. May these small victories be the harbingers to greater ones, and then may our Noble Country having won its independence be long blessed with peace.” Across the Mississippi, Edwin Fay saw the 1864 campaigns in the same light, “God in his mercy has favored our Arms this Spring.” How soldiers interpreted news from distant theaters will be examined more fully in another chapter, but it is worth noting here that troops consider combinations of victories that spanned the nation -- regardless of their size – signs of God’s work on the Rebellion’s behalf.

Many soldiers witnessed God’s hand on every level of the war effort; His domain spread from the individual soldier to the nation. The Almighty shielded soldiers’ bodies in combat, led their armies to victory in campaigns, and oversaw their country’s bid for independence. As William Heartsill concisely remarked, “kind Providence is with us in this great struggle.” On this particular occasion, Heartsill interpreted the rainstorms that helped Confederate crops as signs of divine partisanship. Because Providence explained the divine hand in history, the idea influenced how soldiers perceived the war’s progress and expected it to end. In other words, many Rebels’ confidence in ultimate triumph was not based on bravado alone but on faith. St. Paul’s assurances to the Romans gave troops comfort and courage: “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them
who are called according to His promise.” On the same day that Heartsill construed rain as a sign of God’s allegiance, Hampton illustrated how this Scripture affected some Confederates’ perspective on the war: “all things work together for good to them that love God & believing we are such I hope we may be profited in our trials.” A sermon printed for the troops echoed this faith: “if we, as a State, and confederation of States, officially and privately, nationally and individually, trust obediently in God, He will be our deliverer.” Southern evangelicalism proclaimed that a soul that loved and confided in God would be saved; Confederate religiosity promulgated that a nation that cherished and trusted Jehovah would also be preserved.35

The potency of this conviction is evident in an ambiguous thought present in many soldiers’ writings: as William Casey put it, “if God is for us, who can be against us.” This sentence touches a core assumption of Confederate religion and the unconquerable mentality. Interpretations of it hinge upon the first word. “If” could represent the conditional and mysterious nature of Providential aid. Perhaps Casey and others meant that no one can be certain of God’s allegiance in war; but if He is for us, no one can defeat us. This view stresses that Confederates must secure God’s blessing by fulfilling their covenant with Him, by seeking Him with true reverence. William Nugent expressed this perspective: “We have nothing to fear if we have the approving smiles of Heaven and are true to ourselves.” Jehovah directs the fate of nations: only if God is for us, can no one defeat us. The meaning changes dramatically, however, when we interpret “if” as a synonym for “because.” Perhaps Casey and others meant, “because God is for us, who can be against us?” Herein the soldiers have assumed divine sanction and thus feel assured of ultimate victory—with God on our side we cannot lose. This latter
interpretation seems closer to some soldiers’ meaning. Thomas Hampton stated it without equivocation: “I feel assured that God is for us & who can be against us.”

Such statements should not be dismissed as figures of speech, because they illuminate people’s mentality during war. The ambiguity of Casey’s assertion probably served a purpose. He and others could sound stalwart in their confidence in the cause while actually meaning to stress how much the Rebellion’s fate was beyond mortal control. Perhaps the meaning of the phrase changed as the war continued. Were Confederates more likely to emphasize their dependence upon divine aid (the first interpretation) in the war’s first years or its last? Conversely, were Rebels more likely to stress their confidence in divine favor (the second interpretation) in the war’s first years or its last? Common sense and historical hindsight might suggest that southerners often expressed certainty in God’s allegiance when things were going well at the war’s outset and concern over seeking celestial help when conditions declined in the war’s final years. It is equally as likely, however, that southerners focused on their covenant with God at the start of the war, when His demands seemed clearer and more attainable, and swore He favored them in the war’s final period, when the stakes and casualties were highest. In other words, perhaps Confederates believed in divine favor more as the war worsened, because they needed to trust in God’s help as the struggle intensified.

To sustain a trust in God’s favor, however, Confederates – like southern evangelicals from earlier times – needed signs of hope and blessing. How and where did Rebels discover reasons for optimism in 1864 and 1865? Because they connected their country’s military success to its piety, public manifestations of faith were “bloodless victories” towards their final triumph. In particular national days of thanksgiving, prayer,
and fasting brought the Confederacy closer to God and, thus, closer to independence. As Stephen Elliot affirmed in a Fast Day sermon, “We have so often seen the gathering fury of our enemies dispersed by God in answer to our humble prayers—scattered and rolled back in blood and confusion—that we come to day boldly to the throne of Grace, firmly believing that our prayers, and supplications, if offered with pure hearts and clean lips, will return to us laden with blessings from the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel.” Charles Fenton James agreed with Elliot and offered a popular opinion among soldiers when he told his sister, “It is a notable fact that we have never yet met with disaster immediately after a fast day. Our arms have always been blessed with success; and not until the people, in the exultation that follows success, have forgotten the giver of all victory and rejoiced in their own strength and given themselves up to pleasure, have our armies met with reverses.”

National fast days rededicated people to the cause and raised their expectations of success. This chapter already explained how late eighteenth-century evangelicals used fast days to prepare the South for the Great Revival of 1800–1805. By addressing the spiritual declension, pledging to live better lives, and praying for an awakening, many southerners began to expect the revival. Though many conditions were necessary for its growth and pervasiveness, the revival was in some respects a self-fulfilling prophecy. Confederates used fast days in the same manner. Numerous Rebels acknowledged some of their sins (most notably extortion), pledged to serve their country better, and prayed for peace and independence. In a society that believed God answers sincere prayers, the spectacle of piety that fast days produced could convince thousands that the Almighty would deliver them from northern peril. On 16 November 1864 Captain Samuel Foster
attended church on a national fast day and estimated that seven hundred men attended the service. In March 1865 Richard Maury noted, "this is the day appointed by Mr. Davis as a time for Fasting, humiliation and prayer – that we may entreat a merciful God to forgive us our sins – to stand on our side and to give us victory." Joseph Manson hoped, "that the prayers of all our people would be increasing until God pours out His blessing upon us."38

Revivals within the ranks were also compelling symbols of Confederate piety and God’s presence. In October 1864 an artilleryman noted, "the revival is spreading & pouring in our Battn, & among our infantry support. Four out of five officers, in one of our batteries have been hopefully converted & many of the men. I mention the officers first, only because religious awakening is less common among them, & they are likely to exert more influence for good. . . . God be with us, our prospects are yet bright."

Historians have noted how revivals countered fears of death, provided diversions in camp, promoted discipline, and fostered primary group cohesion among Christian soldiers. Revivals were also significant for the spectacle of piety they produced. Just as grand reviews and sham battles impressed soldiers with their army’s material power, great revivals awed the men with their collective moral strength. The sight of thousands of comrades seeking God’s forgiveness and protection convinced many Rebels that their army was as holy as Joshua’s Israelites. Samuel McKittrick, a captain in the Army of Tennessee, admitted, "it is an impressive scene to see a large mass of sinful creatures standing upon the brink of eternity, worshipping perhaps for the last time in this world." Robert Stiles was equally impressed with the sound of a reverent army; he wrote his sister, "it would do you good to hear the hymns ascending all along the line of battle
about dusk each evening. It will not do to rely on these religious features of our army in any self-righteous, self gratulatory spirit; yet it is encouraging to be thus assured of God’s presence & blessing with us. Do not be too confident, yet you may encourage an almost buoyant hope in these days of constant repeated victory.” During the Atlanta campaign, one soldier observed, “there is a better morale tone exhibited here than I have ever seen among soldiers. Thousands have been converted and are happy Christians. Nearly all our first Generals have joined the Church and the army is fast becoming literally a God-fearing soldiery. This I regard as a very favorable omen and as strongly indicative of our success. In fact our men look upon success as certain whenever we get old Sherman to fight us squarely and quit his everlasting flanking.” According to this perspective, each baptism or conversion of a soldier increased God’s favor and brought the Confederacy one step closer to peace and independence. Fast days and revivals produced a spectacle of piety that reinforced the propaganda that consecrated the Rebellion.

Rebel Theodicy

Antebellum evangelical inheritances, church propaganda, and spectacles of piety sustained many Rebels’ faith into the final period of the war, but do these influences explain why so many soldiers still thought God favored their cause after strings of major defeats? Old notions of southern sacredness might survive the conflict’s first years when the Rebellion thwarted Union offensives and stymied Washington strategists, but how could these assumptions withstand Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and the Overland campaign? If victories were signs of celestial aid, why were successive defeats not portents of Almighty wrath? Many men in the ranks voiced concerns about southern sinfulness and
deemed Confederate reverses signs of national depravity, but few Rebels doubted that God would save them in the end—rare was the southerner who thought God had forsaken the cause.

If Providence was the religious conviction that spawned Confederate confidence in divine help, theodicy—a religious accounting for the existence of suffering and evil—preserved this view through the hell-fires of 1864–1865. Worldviews perish when they fail to explain the hardships their adherents face. In the war’s last stage, a host of anomies challenged the Rebel worldview: soldiers wondered why has God permitted foreign hordes to occupy our soil, why has God overseen the deaths of hundreds of thousands, why has God directed slaves to leave their masters and join the enemy ranks, why has God allowed famine and destruction in this land of plenty, and where is God’s mercy in the sick pens of Libby Prison, the charred remains of Columbia, the bloodbath at Franklin, Tennessee? In the end, Confederate theodicy did not dispense happiness to overcome the war’s suffering—that was not its primary purpose. Rather theodicy had to answer these questions, to explain death, evil, and anguish for all Confederates, from the uneducated boy in the trenches to the plantation mistress.40

For soldiers, death and defeat offered the toughest challenges to their worldview. Because they envisioned God’s work everywhere, Confederates often held God accountable when grapeshot turned the most devout comrades into pulp or when enemy forces beat Rebel armies that fasted and prayed. How did they reconcile such destruction of the faithful? Evangelical Christianity explained death without equivocation. Death was God’s bidding, and the loss of any comrade was a signal for the living to repent and prepare for their end. Besides, for believers death delivered triumph, joy, and entrance
into God's kingdom. Defeats confronted Confederate assumptions more directly. Within
the Rebel worldview, setbacks were not signs of divine anger, because God loved those
who believed in Him. Many Rebels thought major reverses resulted from God chastening
His people for their sinfulness. After all, if the Confederacy was blessed with divine
sanction, no amount of Union victories could lead the enemy to ultimate triumph. God
was punishing the Rebellion as a father disciplines his child. From this perspective,
adversity and hardships tested the young nation's faith and galvanized its national
character. Some southerners drew parallels to the American Revolution: the Continentals
suffered through Valley Forge before they reached Yorktown.41

Confederate expressions of faith during their nation's eleventh hour illustrate the
strength of this theodicy. After a month of the grinding Overland campaign, William
Casey admitted that he was "very nearly broken down from fighting and working." Even
worse, he learned all his family's slaves left with enemy forces that ravaged his home.
Casey wrote his mother, "I know that you are not in good spirits But you must try and put
your trust in the Lord, and every thing will turn out for the best." The next day Sergeant
Rawleigh Downman tried to console his wife over the death of her close friend. "Look to
Him & call upon Him for strength," Downman advised. "Whom he loveth He chaseneth-
--and we must bear his rod with resignation though to our mortal eyes it seemeth
grevious. In all things let us bless God though at times his hand he laid heavily upon us."
In late February 1865 Thomas Hampton thought "that this war will in a short time
assume a different character I. E. for our good." Hampton confessed, "although things to
some may look gloomy yet I do not see why we should dispare as in God we may look
for redemption."42
Throughout 1864 and 1865, many men imagined that God and the Confederacy would overcome the gloom just as sunlight inexplicably pierces ominous storm clouds or ends darkest night. In February 1865 Joseph Manson prayed, “oh God be with me & clear up all darkness & dispendency.” Manson knew that “tho all seems dark He can bring deliverance.” Weeks earlier James Keith still believed, “the end may not be far off & the sun of peace with happiness in every ray may yet shine out to gild the evening of our days. . . . the eye of faith see[s] only the silver lining of the cloud & look[s] to him who has promised never to desert those who put their trust in him.” As late as March 1865, Edward Crenshaw also sought brightness amidst the gloom. He confided in his diary, “the South is being sorely tried, and if she is not found wanting in the balance, the dark clouds of adversity will soon clear away from her horizon and the bright sun of victory will shine out resplendently.”

Men who possessed this view focused on the thinnest silver linings and chased rainbows until the war’s outcome. For them, Rebel theodicy not only explained defeats but also encouraged hope (albeit ultimately a false hope). Soldier’s hope was born in assurances that God watched over them and in the escapism that religion provided. In January 1865 Robert Stiles wrote from the trenches: “Oh! it is pleasant, in the midst of this torrent & rush of earthly burdens & confusion, to turn to the green pastures & the still waters of God’s love.” Less than a month before Appomattox, he admitted, “God has been good & merciful in taking away the once abiding consciousness of desolation.” For some Confederates the comforts of religion were so great that a spiritual mode of thought became almost a preoccupation. On 27 October 1864 one such Rebel, Joseph Manson, started a diary that could more appropriately be called a prayer book:
I begin today to note down in this little book, the dealings of God with my soul... My mind is drawn towards my kind heavenly Father in love & praise. I have enjoyed more of his Favor during the past months than ever before... My happiness consists in meeting with Him in secret. I love to commune with my own heart & be still. The world has lost much of its power over me & I feel that I can cheerfully exchange the greatest attractions [of this world] for the smiles of my blessed Saviour. I have solemnly given myself in Covenant to God to be His in time and eternity. His kind hand has been thrown around me & my life has been prolonged... Oh God show me the path of duty & incline my heart to walk therein. Through this day be very near me. May it be a day of sweetness to my poor soul & prepare me for the trials that may be before me & bring me off... Bless the dear ones of my heart. Receive us all to Thyself at last for Jesus sake. Amen!"

Joseph Manson’s concentration on the divine makes his record one of the most remarkable diaries of the Civil War. Subjects commonly found in soldiers’ accounts are replaced in Manson’s work with celestial elements. Instead of writing about the torn earth of Petersburg or his home in Brunswick County, Virginia, Manson described heaven. Instead of focusing on family ties to his wife and children, Manson stressed his covenant with Jesus Christ. Instead of admiring officers, like his able brigadier, William Mahone, or his colorful corps commander, A. P. Hill, Manson praised God. Instead of detailing in his diary the daily traffic of men and arms, Manson scribbled down the movements of his soul as it sought God beyond the horrors of war. And if he should perish in battle, instead of hoping that he would die facing the enemy, Manson prayed, “Oh God may I be found with my face towards the Celestial City & my Armor on.”

Manson began his diary in the trenches of Petersburg and thousands of his comrades found religion there, because spirituality aided soldiers’ construction and maintenance of reality. In 1864 the war entered a new phase as Generals U. S. Grant and William T. Sherman ceaselessly pushed towards their objectives, Richmond and Atlanta.
Even the most hardened veterans felt the physical and mental effects of the change. They were accustomed to set battles of one to three days followed by months of recovery. Now they fought and marched by day and dug and guarded trenches at night. It was one of the most profound changes in a war on the cusp of modernity. No doubt the war's acceleration affected the frequency of prayer meetings, but the unparalleled destruction of the this final chapter compelled more men to religious reflections. After enduring years of terrible carnage together, soldiers watched scores of comrades die within months. In the constant fighting from Dalton to Atlanta, Samuel Vann's company lost forty-four men killed and severely wounded. "We have 19 men in the Co. here now," Vann explained. This attrition compelled Vann's comrades to participate in prayer meetings despite "balls flying around the congregation all the time." Vann surmised that a soldier only had "to look around and see how our ranks have been thinned out" to repent and seek God. It is not a coincidence that more chapels were built along the trenches of Petersburg in 1864–1865 than were constructed in camps during the previous winter.45

Casualties encouraged reflection for reasons other than personal salvation; men sought religion not only for entrance into the next world but for explanations of this one. The loss of friends and the growing infrequency of letters from home deprived soldiers of contact with the people who helped them made sense of the conflict. As sociologist Peter Berger explains, "the subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation." Discourse with comrades and family members reaffirmed what was real in a chaotic and lonely environment. Many Rebels who were divorced from these connections bolstered their tottering perceptions with the reassurances of evangelicalism. At prayer meetings soldiers bonded with fellow survivors and found answers for the
carnage and filth that surrounded them. W. L. Curry, chaplain of the 50th Georgia Infantry, cataloged the extent of religious activity among his men in the summer of 1864: "a prayer-meeting at sunrise, an inquiry-meeting at 8, preaching at 11, a prayer-meeting at 4 for the success of our (Confederate) cause, preaching again at night, was the usual programme of the day... We usually had from fifty to seventy-five brethren at these... The religious interest of the brigade seemed more general than I had ever seen it before." 46

A Deviating Conception of the Covenant

The constancy and influence of Confederate religion exhibit the power of intangible, subjective elements in warfare. Evangelicalism's aid was more essence than substance. Instead of giving the Rebellion legions, provisions, or currency, Christianity bolstered these material needs in transient ways: revivals galvanized troop morale, fast days sanctified hunger and want in the cause of patriotism, and clergy damned extortionists. Most central to this study, Confederate spirituality never whipped a Union army, but it created a worldview that colored every engagement as either a divine triumph or a holy chastening, thus undermining the objective significance of reversals. Moreover, because many Rebels' theory of Providential deliverance maximized God's role and minimized human responsibility for the ultimate outcome, it underestimated the very factors that caused Confederate defeat: deficient supplies and manpower, crippling inflation, international isolation, a strangling blockade, the disintegration of slavery, northern strength and determination, and disaffection within the ranks and at home. For devout southerners all these elements were dwarfed in significance by the will of God. 47
As the struggle worsened, some clergy espoused intemperate views that bolstered soldiers’ confidence in divine favor. Protestant Episcopal Bishop Stephen Elliott was especially guilty of this irresponsible partisanship. At the funeral of General Leonidas K. Polk, Elliott’s friend and fellow clergyman, the bishop delivered a blistering diatribe. For dramatic effect, Elliott turned northward to address his enemies:

And now, ye Christians of the North, and especially ye priests and bishops of the church who have lent yourselves to the fanning of the fury of this unjust and cruel war, do I this day, in the presence of the body of my murdered brother, summon you to meet us at the judgment seat of Christ . . . that awful bar where the multitudes whom you have followed to do evil shall not shield you from an angry God; where the vain excuses with which you have varnished your sins shall be scattered before the bright beams of eternal truth and righteousness. I summon you to that bar in the name of sacred Liberty which you have trampled under foot; in the name of the glorious Constitution which you have destroyed; in the name of the temples of God which you have desecrated; in the name of our Christian women whom you have violated; in the name of our slaves whom you have seduced and then consigned to misery; and there I leave justice and vengeance to God. The blood of your brethren crieth unto God from the earth, and it will not cry in vain. It has entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth, and will return upon you in that day of solemn justice and fearful retribution.

Elliott was too certain of his cause and convictions to fathom that he too was responsible for “fanning the flames” of a cruel war.48

In a very different funeral sermon, John Paris preached over the bodies of twenty-two North Carolinians executed for desertion. He did not eulogize the dead who had been “wicked and deluded men” but instead damned their “heinous and ruinous crime,” because it was too prevalent in the army. Paris proclaimed, “I am not sufficiently skilled in language to command words to express the deep and unutterable detestation I have of
the character of a deserter.” He reminded the men that “the true Christian is always a true patriot,” and “we never were born to be the slaves of the Yankees.”

Other ministers espoused equally fiery rhetoric. Anticipating the destruction of 1864-1865, one chaplain appealed to the manhood and patriotism of his brigade and informed them, “you who have offered your lives upon your country’s altar, cannot fail to sacrifice your property rather than entail a cruel state of bondage upon your offspring.” He beseeched the men, “when the enemy [note he says when, not if] comes in like a flood, to overwhelm your land in desolation and woe, let us put our trust in the God of battles and strike like men determined to be free!” Another minister presumed to know the Union’s limits in manpower and promised Confederates that the enemy’s “pompous pretensions break down by [their] sheer incapacity to sustain them.” He reported that the Federals “are now putting forth all their might for one grand onslaught, with no possibility of repeating it, on the same scale.” What of the manpower shortages in the South? “The case is entirely different with a people like ourselves, acting on the defensive,” he proclaimed. “The limit of our endurance is comparatively indefinite. Our expenditure of men and means is so far less, that we may render ourselves invincible either by the number of our foes, or the duration of the war; and availing ourselves of auspicious advantages, we may force the enemy to his last experiment.” On 1 May 1865, when the Rebellion was forced to its “last experiment,” a chaplain preached to his soldiers in the open woods. With thousands of other Rebels surrendering or deserting across the Confederacy, the chaplain chose Revelations 2:10 for his Scripture lesson: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a Crown of life.”
These messages were potent within the war’s context. Many factors, including their evangelical inheritance, their needs within the army, and their theodicy, encouraged soldiers to accept the partisanship of church propaganda. As the war intensified so did soldiers’ convictions. What started as a belief in Providence and an assumption that Confederates were holier than Yankees, grew into a sense of invincibility – the Rebellion could not fail, because God favored it. William Nugent bluntly expressed this faith: “God is on our side.” Instead of hoping that their country was on God’s side, many Rebels came to share Nugent’s belief that God was on their country’s side. How did these convictions differ? The first one, more consistent with evangelicalism, envisioned the Creator as an unknowable arbiter over battlefields whose design was Providence’s progress. Hoping the Confederacy was on God’s side emphasized citizens’ obligations to Him as well as to their country. Some strands of this thought persisted in fast day sermons until the end of the war. Clergy continued to implore Rebels to repent of their sins in order to deserve divine aid. But over time even fast day sermons highlighted the Confederacy’s special place in God’s heart and stressed how He was directing them to victory. This emphasis signaled the second, more fanatical vision of God as an omnipotent and ever-present ally whose plan was Confederate independence.51

Southern clergy were not solely responsible for this shift, though millions of religious pamphlets written and circulated by them greatly affected the change. American millenialism, Rebel spectacles of piety, and, in the end, the personal and collective views of the soldiers themselves also fostered this fanatical perspective. The men relied on God for assurances that no other source could provide. This chapter has demonstrated how soldiers relied on divine protection in combat. In the maelstrom of battle no other
source, not comrades, fortifications, weapons, tactics, or heroism could shield them from
death; only God could. Likewise from a Christian perspective, no other body, not the
president, a general, a trusted friend, or even an entire army could protect soldiers' families from destitution or invasion like Jehovah could. No doubt thousands of Rebels hoped and prayed for that protection as Federal armies wrecked the homefront. Finally, when Confederates suffered one setback after another in 1864 and 1865, no other element, not foreign powers, Copperheads, General Robert E. Lee, or even devotion to the cause, could guarantee victory like the promise of God's favor could. Because of these comforts and the other benefits of religion, Christianity was a powerful sustaining force for Confederate morale throughout the war and particularly during its final period.⁵²

Most Confederates retained their notion of a national covenant with God, but their focus shifted from human obligations to divine rewards. In 1862 the language in a sermon revealed how enticing this shift could be: "So long as we shall deeply feel our dependence on God alone, and put our trust in Him, He will favor us, and our progress will be irresistible as the march of time." By 1864 the shift in perspective was evident. While Lee's troops fought a continuous campaign against Grant's army from the Wilderness to the trenches of Petersburg, Confederates read religious pronouncements like this one: "The progressive proofs of God's good providence, in our behalf, strengthen the conviction that the period of our deliverance is not remote. Step by step, have we been led through the bloody scenes of our national drama, by the most manifest interposition of his hand. . . . Have we been brought so far, only to be abandoned in the last stage of the journey, and to perish in the passage, as a monument of Divine
delusion?” Most Confederate soldiers did not think so. Within their worldview, defeat would signify that God had tricked and forsaken them, and that was unthinkable.53

2 Samuel Horace Hawes diary, 12 February 1865, Virginia Historical Society (VHS).

3 For an analysis of how mortality and anomie reveal religious convictions, see Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*.


5 This argument—that religion bolstered the Confederate war effort by sustaining Rebel morale and even obscuring defeat from Confederate soldiers—counters a popular thesis that southern Protestantism, particularly its fatalism, lowered morale and eroded the war effort. Some historians contend that southern evangelicalism’s focus on individual salvation and the afterlife undermined the political activity and secular labors required to win the war. Some scholars also aver that southern guilt over slavery, when combined with the fear of God’s wrath, created a subconscious expectation of defeat. Or, as the authors of *Why the South Lost the Civil War* expressed it: “God’s will became a psychological bridge to the acceptance of defeat.” According to this view, as casualty lists swelled and military setbacks multiplied, the religious and psychological inclinations of the South towards defeat “served as a self-fulfilling prophecy.” I agree that southerners used the will of God to explain defeat, but while these historians claim that this perspective preceded military capitulation, I argue that most religious rationalizations for defeat happened after the surrender. For the opposite view, see Richard Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still, Jr., eds., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, Ga., 1986) first and second quotations on 353 and 360 respectively, Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *A Shield and a Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies* (Macon, Ga., 1987), 10-12, and Larry Logue, *To Appomattox and Beyond: The Civil War Soldiers in War and Peace* (Chicago, 1996), 78. The same benefits and costs of religion influenced the Union war effort. For the Confederacy, see W. Harrison Daniel, *Southern Protestantism in the Confederacy* (Bedford, Va., 1989), and for both sides, see Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York, 1991).

6 In *Gospel of Disunion*, Mitchell Slay stresses how these same three developments aided the growth of southern separatism and secession. My work shows how these antebellum influences also helped the construction of an unquerelable mentality that colored Confederates’ perceptions of the war in 1864-1865. In other words, antebellum religion not only contributed to disunion and the war’s beginnings but also affected the last phase of the Rebel war effort and the war’s ending. See Slay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, 1993), 3-5.


10 Ibid., 28-30.

11 Ibid., 27.


13 Boles, Irony of Southern Religion, 5-6.

14 Ibid., 75-76. My treatment of the 1800–1805 revival as a foundation for Confederate religion continues the tradition of viewing this event, and the Second Great Awakening in general, as either a product or precursor of important trends in American history. For a survey of this scholarship, see Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Religion (New Haven, 1989), 220-26.


18 Joseph M. Atkinson, The Giver of Victory and Peace. A Thanksgiving Sermon, Delivered in the Presbyterian Church, September 18, 1862, Raleigh, N. C. [4123] (Raleigh, 1862), 11. This and subsequent sermons are contained in the Confederate Imprints Microfilm Series. The number in brackets after the title is that sermon’s identification number in the CIAMS. Thomas S. Dunaway, A Sermon Delivered by Elder
Thomas S. Dunaway, of Lancaster County, Virginia, before Coan Baptist Church . . . . [4138-2] (Richmond, 1864), 3-4.

19 J. J. D. Renfroe, "The Battle is God's." A Sermon Preached before Wilcox's Brigade . . . [4186] (Richmond, 1863), 7. The language John Boles used to explain evangelicals' mentality in the 1790s is equally enlightening for the Rebel worldview: "Given their way of looking at God working in history, any event or situation necessarily and irrevocably was destined to bear the imprint of Providence," in Great Revival, 25.

20 William Rees, A Sermon on Divine Providence; Delivered February 4th, 1863, (Thanksgiving Day,) in the Methodist Church, at Austin . . . [4185-1] (Austin?, 1863), 3.

21 J. L. Burrows, Nationality Insured! Notes of A Sermon Delivered at the First Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga., September 11th, 1864 . . . [4129] (Augusta, 1864), 4; Dunaway, A Sermon, 11. Faust and Genovese overemphasize the critical tone of the wartime jeremiads. For every critical remark they quote, you can quote a laudatory comment that connected Confederate independence to God's plan. Of course, the message scholars stress corresponds to the thesis they present; but it is important to note that the soldiers themselves highlighted the positive connections between God's law and Confederate values.

22 Joseph M. Atkinson, The Giver of Victory and Peace. A Thanksgiving Sermon, Delivered in the Presbyterian Church, September 18, 1862, Raleigh, N. C. [4123] (Raleigh, 1862?), 13, 5-7. John Boles and others have noted how early Confederate successes convinced Rebels that they had divine help: "In the heady days following the First Battle of Bull Run, when southern armies won a string of victories in the eastern campaigns and Lincoln suffered through one disappointing general after another, it was easy for Confederate partisans to see the hand of God behind southern success," in Irony of Southern Religion, 93. Another excellent example similar to Atkinson's sermon is Stephen Elliott, Ezra Dilemma . . . (Savannah, 1863), published in David B. Chesebrough, ed., "God Ordained This War": Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865 (Columbia, 1991), 246-63. Elliott begins, "From the beginning of the revolution in which we are yet so sternly engaged, we have boldly assumed the position, that we were fighting under the shield of the Lord of Hosts. . . . This has been our boast and consolation. It has supported us under all our sacrifices, and has cheered us through all our days of darkness. . . . Not only has it been chanted in the sanctuaries of Christianity, but our civil rulers have recognized it in their papers of State, and our great Captains have proclaimed it from the head of their armies in victory as well as in defeat," in "God Ordained," 246.

Church Propaganda (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1957), and Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge and London, 1988), particularly 22-40. Faust describes religion as “the fundamental idiom of national and personal identity” within the newborn nation [see, Drew Gilpin Faust, “Christian Soldiers: The Meaning of Revivalism in the Confederate Army,” *Journal of Southern History* LIII (February 1987), 63-90, quotation on p. 64], and she frames Confederate uses of religion as a self-conscious strategy for legitimation, “a posture designed to win support both at home and abroad” [Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, p. 22]. According to Faust this strategy backfired when the internal logic of evangelicalism made religion critical of the nation and its efforts. I have two caveats: First, by framing southern evangelicalism as a strategy appropriate to the exigencies of nation-building and warfare, Faust highlights its role in ideology and propaganda to a degree that colors southern evangelicalism as a tool consciously chosen by leaders for its usefulness. I stress how religion was a powerful influence upon the worldview of southerners both elite and common. In other words, Confederates did not select religion as a fundamental element of their society; evangelicalism was already woven into the fabric of their culture and worldview. Second, though focusing on elite rhetoric, Faust gives the impression that evangelicalism’s criticism of the Confederacy was a national discourse shared by all classes. Many common citizens used religion to criticize actions in Richmond or the conduct of other social classes, but some elements of the evangelical critique were conspicuously absent from the soldiers’ discourse. Most notably, Rebel soldiers said little or nothing about how the practices of southern slavery were sins against God worthy of divine punishment.


25 Quoted in Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 29. Faust notes, “the analogy between the Confederacy and the chosen Hebrew nation was invoked so often as to be transformed into a figure of everyday speech. Like the United States before it, the Confederacy became the redeemer nation, the new Israel,” 29.


30 William Casey to mother, 28 June 1864, William Thomas Casey Papers, VHS; William M. Cash and Lucy Somerville Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie: The Civil War Letters of William L. Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent (Jackson, Miss., 1977), 216-17; Robert Stiles to Rosa Stiles, 15 June 1864, Robert Augustus Stiles Papers, VHS; Lucille Griffith, ed., Yours Till Death: Civil War Letters of John W. Cotton (Birmingham, Ala. 1951), 107-08. Also see, Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 5 June 1864, in Blomquist and Taylor, eds., This Cruel War, 256. Some soldiers reasoned that God could protect them in battle as easily as He could elsewhere. Frederick Bowen wrote his cousin, "I was not alarmed in the fight, felt that my Maker could preserve me there as elsewhere, & should I fall it would be all well." Frederick Bowen to "Charlie," 15 October 1864, Frederick Fillison Bowen Papers, VHS. Likewise, Thomas Hampton assured his wife, "I want you to cheer up & recollect that the same hand that protected me while quietly following the peaceful avocation of Farming is no less visible here in the Rough & dangerous looking Depth of a life & Death struggle with an Imbittered foe." Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 19 July 1864, Thomas Hampton Letters UT, CAH.

31 William Casey to mother, 3 April 1864, William Thomas Casey Papers, VHS; Resolutions from Benning's, Bryan's, Wofford's, Anderson's, and Evans' brigades quoted in Bennett, A Narrative of the Great Revival, 420-21; Mother to Dunbar Affleck, 21 May 1864, Thomas Affleck Correspondence and Writings, Louisiana State University, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library (LSU); Mary Alice (Macgruder) Downman to Rawleigh William Downman, 10 April 10 1865, Downman Family Papers, VHS; Silver, Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda, 14.

32 William Casey to mother, 3 April 1864, William Thomas Casey Papers, VHS. Casey also disparaged parties in a letter to his sister; see William Casey to [Bell?] Ann Casey, 31 January 1864, William Thomas Casey Papers, VHS. Charles Fenton James to Emma James, 13 February 1865. Charles Fenton James Letters. VHS. Also see, James McPherson, For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War (New York
and Oxford, 1997), 64-67, and Berends, "Wholesome Reading," in Miller, Stout, and Wilson, eds., Religion and the American Civil War, 139.

33 Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, 6 May 1864, in John Rozier, ed., The Granite Farm Letters: The Civil War Correspondence of Edgeworth & Sallie Bird (Athens and London, 1988), 164-65. In the same letter Bird told his wife, "we have been successful all along the line, as far as I can learn. It has not been decisive today, and the heavier battle is looked for tomorrow. God be with us, and I believe he is. We have done well tho' we are greatly outnumbered." Samuel McKittrick to Mary Stennis McKittrick, 17 May 1864, in Donald W. Lewis, ed., "A Confederate Officer's Letters on Sherman's March to Atlanta" Georgia Historical Quarterly LI (December 1967), 491-94, quotation on p. 493; Thomas B. Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 29 February 1864, Hampton Letters UT CAH; Frank Batchelor to "My Dear Wife," 30 June 1864, H. J. H. Rugeley, ed., Batchelor-Turner Letters, 1861-1864; Written by Two of Terry's Texas Rangers (Austin, Tx. 1961), 81; William L. Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 25 June 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 184. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson exemplified this mentality best. "For Stonewall Jackson," Charles Royster explains, "the course of combat was divinely ordered. Every incident came from the will of God. Apparent mistakes and confusion only seemed chaotic or disastrous; they were God's way of working out His beneficent intentions for those who loved Him." Jackson "took every opportunity to emphasize God's direction of events. Even some of his shortest, most urgent battlefield notes, let alone official reports, acknowledged his dependence on divine rule." See Royster, The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans (New York, 1991), 267-68.


35 William W. Heartsill diary, 7 June 1864, in Bell I. Wiley, ed., Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army (Jackson, Tn., 1954), 207; Romans 8:28, King James Bible; Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 7 June 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT CAH; Rees, A Sermon on Divine Providence, 11.

36 William Casey to mother, 28 June 1864, William Thomas Casey Papers, VHS; William L. Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 25 June 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 185; Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 29 April 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT CAH.

37 Propaganda in the religious military press used this term: "every revival of religion in your midst . . . is a bloodless victory over the enemy of our country," quoted by Berends, "Wholesome Reading," in Miller, Stout, and Wilson, eds., Religion and the American Civil War, 146. Stephen Elliott, Gideon's Water-Lappers. A Sermon Preached in Christ Church, Savannah . . . . [4143] (Macon Ga, 1864), 5; Charles Fenton James to Emma A.
James, 13 February, 1865, Charles Fenton James Letters, VHS. W. Harrison Daniel, *Southern Protestantism in the Confederacy* (Bedford, Va., 1989), 29. On 23 February 1865 chaplain R. F. Bunting reassured his listeners, "the Lord has as much to do now with the affairs of men, as when the glory of His presence filled the tabernacle ... or when He conversed with Abraham." Reviewing the three-year contest, Bunting contended that public piety had secured Confederate victories. As Berends explains, "For three columns, Bunting carefully summarized the role of Divine Providence in the war. Every public fast was followed by a victory. Sadly though, the months after each victory revealed a nation not yet prepared for brilliant success." Davis had called another fast day and Bunting was confident that if the South observed it faithfully, "He will again draw near and give us deliverance from our present perils, crowning our arms with glorious victory." See Berends, 152-53. On 9 June 1864 the *Christian Observer* "proved" the following fast days promoted Confederate victories: 13 June 1861 (Manassas), 15 May 1862 (Seven Days), 27 March 1863 (Chancellorsville), and 21 August 1863 (Chickamauga). President Davis called for national fasts on Thursday, 13 June, 1861; Friday, 15 November, 1861; Friday, 16 May, 1862; Thursday, 18 Sept. 1862; Friday, 27 March, 1863; Friday, 21 August, 1863; Friday, 8 April, 1864; Wednesday 16, Nov., 1864; and Thursday, 3 March, 1865. Of course, the actual fast days were observed within a week or so of Davis' announcements. See Silver, *Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda*, 64-65.

38 Samuel Foster diary, 16 November, 1864, quoted in Norman D. Brown, ed., *One of Cleburne's Command: The Civil War Reminiscences and Diary of Capt. Samuel T. Foster, Granbury's Texas Brigade, CSA* (Austin, Tex., and London, 1980), 145; Richard Launcelot Maury Diary, 10 March 1865, VHS; Joseph Richard Manson Diary, 16 November 1864, VHS; James Alexander Turrentine Diary, 10 March 1865, VHS. Of course, not every soldier honored fast days. Charles Blackford voiced a common joke when he quipped, "to name one day as a fast day is most amusing since almost any given day is a fast-day for all, whether citizen or soldier." Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 10 March 1865, in Susan Leigh Blackford and Charles Minor, III, eds., *Letters From Lee's Army: Or Memoirs of Life In and Out of the Army in Virginia During the War Between the States* (Lincoln and London, 1998), 279. Harrison Daniel stesses that "fast-day sermons ... were characterized by their patriotic fervor. ... Mrs. Mary B. Chestnut once attended a fast-day sermon and confessed that the sermon, 'stirred my blood, my flesh crept and tingly. A red hot glow of patriotism passed over me. There was ... exhortation to fight and die.'" See Daniel, *Southern Protestantism in the Confederacy*, 29. Also see Arthur James Freemantle, *Three Months in the Southern States: April-June, 1863* (New York, 1864), p. 157. For clergy's criticism of southern sins, see Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, and Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens, Ga., 1998).

39 Robert Stiles to mother, 2 October, 1864, Stiles to sister, 20 May 1864, both in Robert Augustus Stiles Papers, VHS; Samuel McKittrick to his Mary Stennis McKittrick, 8 May 1864, in Donald W. Lewis, ed., "A Confederate Officer's Letters on Sherman's March to
Atlanta" *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 51 (December 1967), 492. William Nugent to Eleanor Nugent, 9 June 1864, in Cash, ed., *My Dear Nellie*, 179. Berends, "Wholesome Reading," 135, 140–41, 146; James I. Robertson, Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia, 1988), 186–88. Reverend D. S. Doggett avowed, "our army, to-day, may be called, a church in the wilderness; a church in whose center abides the Shekinah, and on whose front towers the pillar of fire; a church, we hope, fulfilling its destiny, and accomplishing its journey to the Canaan of a permanent national repose. It is reported, that in one of the Roman armies, there was a legion composed of Christians. It obtained the designation of the 'Thundering Legion,' because of the mysterious power which attended its arms. May we not hope, that a thousand thundering legions, under the banner of the cross, as well as the banner of the Confederacy, along our extended line, will, when the hour of conflict arrives, do honor to both." The War and Its Close. . . . [4137] (Richmond, 1864), 15. For another soldier who noted the piety of Confederate generals, see George Marion Coiner to sister, 20 Mar 1864, Coiner Family Papers, VHS.

40 Peter Berger makes this point: "It is not happiness that theodicy primarily provides, but meaning. And it is probable . . . that, in situations of acute suffering, the need for meaning is as strong as or even stronger than the need for happiness. To be sure, the individual suffering from a tormenting illness, say, or from oppression and exploitation at the hands of fellowmen, desires relief from these misfortunes. But he equally desires to know why these misfortunes have come to him in the first place. If a theodicy answers, in whatever manner, this question of meaning, it serves a most important purpose for the suffering individual, even if it does not involve a promise that the eventual outcome of his suffering is happiness in this world or the next. It would, for this reason, be misleading to consider theodicies only in terms of their 'redemptive' potential. Indeed, some theodicies carry no promise of 'redemption' at all---except for the redeeming assurance of meaning itself." Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 58.

41 Again Boles' insights on earlier evangelicalism holds true for Confederate religiosity. Like their predecessors, devout Rebels preached, "out of disappointment and pain came patience and strength—lessons long taught by Christianity." *(Great Revival*, 30). Charles Royster explains that Americans on both sides expected, even demanded, the war's destructive nature because they thought a great effusion of blood would purge America of its sins a God directs the effusion of blood and life. See Royster, *The Destructive War*. In the war's final period death challenged Rebels' convictions in multiple ways: not only did theodicy have to calm their fears of mortality, it also had to convince them that dying for their country was still a sacred act. This challenge was critical after Spottsylvania Court House and Franklin. Some men must have struggled with Herman Melville's perception that they "came from the South with golden mottoes in the mouth, to lie down midway in a bloody bed." [See Herman Melville, “On the Slain Collegians,” in Douglas Robillard, ed., *Poems of Herman Melville* (New Haven, 1976), 109-111.] As the war worsened, Rebel theodicy had to consecrate increasingly futile sacrifices. But they may not have seemed more futile or tragic from the soldiers' perspective if they were still confident of victory.
42 William Casey to mother, 19 June 1864, William Thomas Casey Papers, VHS; Rawleigh Downman to Mary Alice (Macgruder) Downman, 20 June 1864, Downman Family Papers, VHS; Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 26 February 1865, Thomas B. Hampton Papers, UT CAH. Hampton’s convictions were consistent to his views a year earlier. On 21 February 1864 he wrote, “It is a hard case but it is nothing more than the disadvantages of such a war will naturally Bring on in its train of ruin we will have to humbly submit to many such trials but I hope that those light affliction will work out for us an eternal weight of glory all such things are sent on us to try our faith so as we may come out pure as [and?] refined as true gold.” See Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 21 February 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Papers, UT CAH. Edwin Fay even voiced a similar faith in the 1864 presidential election: “God will work it all out for the best in some way I believe. I want to see the Yankee nation without a Govt. enjoying what they are so fond of, a state of Anarchy and confusion.” Fay to Sarah Shields Fay. Jul 17/64, in Wiley, ed., “This Infernal War,” 399.


44 Robert Stiles to mother, 19 Jan 1865, Stiles to mother, 21 March 1865, Robert Augustus Stiles Papers, VHS; Joseph Richard Manson Diary, 27 October 1864, 17 December 1864, VHS. Reading Manson’s entire diary impresses the reader with his devotion. Some other quotations to note: “My mind is more at rest. In the progress of my Christian warfair I find peace only in keeping close to my Saviour & by prayer & supplication making my wants known unto Him”(21 February 1865). “My Christian duties are all pleasant duties. I love to be much with my Father in secret. This day shall be given to the service of my maker. Oh that I could spend it far from the thought of battle & the surroundings of war” (30 Oct 1864).

45 Samuel King Vann to Nancy Elizabeth Neel, 25 August, 27 September 1864, in Elliott, ed., Most Lovely Lizzie, 47-48, 53. The Lost Cause chroniclers, Jones and Bennett, recognized that soldiers’ religious fervor increased as the war intensified. Bennett wrote, “In the close of this year (1864) the revival power was as great, perhaps greater, among our soldiers than at any previous period.” Likewise, "The anchor of hope held more securely as the storm increased. The serene courage and perfect trust of Christian soldiers were the richest legacies of those gloomy days." See Bennett, A Narrative of The Great Revival, 412, 416. Bennett considered soldiers’ increased interest in spirituality as evidence that the Rebels' cause was sacred and their character was holier than their enemy’s. Both claims are preposterous; soldiers’ increased devotion was evidence of their need for comfort and courage during the hell of 1864-1865, and Union soldiers sought religion for the same purposes and in the same degree. Steven Woodworth stresses that the religious fervor of Union and Confederate armies remained
steady, and perhaps increased in the final period of the war, in *While God is Marching On*. Also see J. Tracy Power, *Lee's Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox* (Chapel Hill, 1998). J. William Jones recalled, "the revivals along the forty miles of Confederate entrenchments, where there were about sixty chapels, during the winter of 1864-65 were as general and as powerful as any we had at all, and only ceased when the army was disbanded." About forty chapels were built along the Rapidan the previous winter. See Jones, *Christ in Camp*, 260-61, 353-54.

46 Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 17. Curry is quoted in Jones, *Christ in Camp*, 504. Though Curry wrote these reflections in 1867, it's doubtful that he embellished his daily schedule. For how revivalism sustained the Confederate ranks, see Faust, "Christian Soldiers," *Journal of Southern History* LIII (February 1987), 63-90. Berends has written, "The success of the revivals begs further examination. The most obvious reasons for the success of the evangelistic message have to do with the nature of war and the message contextualized to the needs of the soldiers. The promise that death was not the end, when death often appeared imminent and final, offered security to soldiers, Yet [sic] to claim that the promise of eternal life makes evangelical Christianity predominantly an 'otherworldly' religion is to do injustice to the whole of the message. Soldiers, daily faced with the horrors of war, did find that the promises of peace and happiness offered hope when in many ways hope seemed all too distant. . . . By conforming to the discipline inherent in the message of evangelical Christianity, many soldiers gained feelings of satisfaction. Likewise, the promise of victory over temptation, the sense of community provided by fellow Christians, and the fusion of the Christian soldier with the theme of honor, all appealed to soldiers in their present situation." Berends, "Wholesome Reading," in Miller, Stout, and Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War*, 140-41.

47 Explaining how intangible elements, like ideology, religion, and mentalities, affect the material prosecution of warfare is a promising inquiry for new military history. In the past these two sides of war, the subjective and the objective, have often been separated in scholarship.


William L. Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 9 June 1864, in Cash, ed., *My Dear Nellie*, 180. This shift in perspective was evident in the religious military press: "At first the RMP clearly differentiated between the cause of God and the cause for the South. But as time went on, it became increasingly difficult to tell the two apart. Everyone, everywhere described the war as 'just,' 'holy,' and 'righteous.' This vocabulary, although significant, was not the only result of the fusion of the two messages. More important, editors and preachers, in their tracts and sermons, pointed to a special relationship with God for the Confederacy." See Berends, "Wholesome Reading," 142.

These comforts can be traced in the writings of soldiers who varied greatly in their concentration on spirituality. The reader can find all these assurances elucidated in Joseph Manson's manuscripts. As Manson suffered through his third winter in the army, he credited his religious faith for his sustained physical strength and raised spirits [See 21, 22, January, 11, 12, 17, February 1865]. With humble reverence, the captain prayed for great things from his Maker. In addition to protection for him and his Christian comrades in battle [See 8 Dec 1864, 6, 8, 9, February 1865], Manson beseeched God to watch over his family, so that he could continue to fight [See 24 November 1864, 6 January 1865] and deliver ultimate victory to the Confederacy [23, 25 January 1865]. All in Joseph Richard Manson Diary, VHS.

Atkinson, "God, The Giver of Victory and Peace," 10; Doggett, "The War and It's Close," 19. Confederate religion did crack under the strain of successive defeats and unprecedented destruction, but it withheld the war storm in the sense that it sustained its tenets until military defeat ended the war. Faithful soldiers who aired despondency in 1865 did not question that the Confederacy had a special covenant with God. Instead they questioned if the people or God had broken the covenant. In January William Nugent blamed the policy: "We have been dreadfully scourged as a people . . . . We believed in the beginning that God would intervene in our behalf and yet left undone those things essential to secure that intervention." See Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 16 January 1865, in Cash, ed., *My Dear Nellie*, 233. Thomas Hampton was more worried about God fulfilling the pact: "I hope God doesn't forsake us." Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 26 June 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT CAH. These statements are remarkable for their rarity.
Chapter Three

The Mask of Cain: Confederate Perceptions of the Enemy

“If war is a political, social, and psychological disaster, it is also a perceptual and rhetorical scandal from which total recovery is unlikely. Looking out upon the wartime world, soldiers and civilians alike reduce it to a simplified sketch featuring a limited series of classifications into which people, in the process dehumanized and deprived of individuality or eccentricity, are fitted.” Paul Fussell, *Wartime.*

*The dabbled clots of brain and gore*
*Across the swirling sabres ran;*
*To me each brutal visage bore,*
*The front of one accursed man.*
Lines from “At Fort Pillow,” by James R. Randall.

Two Enemies

In all wars, adversaries fight at least two enemies: actual opponents, the individual people, in all their complexities, who fill the ranks and support the other side’s war effort, and the imagined foe, the caricatures, devoid of complexity and individuality, that animate fear and hatred. Belligerents seldom differentiate between the two and often use simplifications of the latter to explain the former. From the time they enlist to oppose a menace they have not seen, soldiers use these abstractions to inform their war. Perceptions of the enemy not only stimulate men to fight and absolve them of guilt for killing, but also affect how soldiers interpret the other side’s actions and measure their resolve. Confederates were no exception. The imagined foe imbued the Confederate worldview through counterpoint; while “the cause” symbolized what Rebels fought for, “the enemy” represented everything they opposed. The particulars of this abstract peril—what it looks like, what its intentions are, where its strengths and weaknesses lie—shaped troops’ expectations as well. Finally, these perceptions of the enemy affected Confederate character—“we” are the opposite of “they.” In the Civil War, adversaries’ identities were formed in opposition, both literally and figuratively.
But as Paul Fussell understood, war “is also a perceptual and rhetorical scandal from which total recovery is unlikely.” Confederate abstractions of the North created two figures of the enemy that biased Rebels’ perceptions throughout the conflict. By viewing Yankees as inept and weak opponents, many Confederate soldiers severely underestimated the foe. Conversely, by deeming the enemy as barbaric hordes, many Rebels foresaw defeat as too terrible to permit. Reunion seemed impossible to these men. A soldier camped in Arkansas during the summer of 1864 illustrates the influence of these perceptions. Writing to his cousin in Louisiana, “Theodore” exclaimed:

> Today we are more independent than those who would subjugate us and who are rapidly drifting into a state of semibarbarism, and in grasping to sure themselves would drag us down with them. But thanks to our own strong arms and the wise heads who are at the helm of our old ship, their efforts are impotent. Too late they see their folly and now cry for peace, no earthly hand can prevent their government, too long under the management of a misguided fanatic, from utter bankruptcy and ruin.

All participants in warfare witness events from perspectives limited by partisanship, but Confederates like “Theodore” were especially affected by their passions for the cause and enmity toward the foe. By limiting their views of the foe to abstract characteristics, Rebels in turn simplified their forecasts for the war’s outcome. The ultimate result was a strengthened resolve to fight on because defeat was either unimaginable or unacceptable.³

**Creating the Enemy: “Myth and truth became indistinguishable.”**

Scholarly debates over whether the antebellum North and South were fundamentally similar or different often fail to explain the bigger question of why enough white southerners believed so strongly in sectional distinctiveness that they seceded and went to war to protect their culture. Emory Thomas reminds us that white southerners
“may have believed a myth about themselves, but because they acted on what they believed, not necessarily on what was true, myth and truth became indistinguishable.” Southern myths contributed to “a climate in which reasonable discourse was no longer possible and in which suspicion and even paranoia replaced confidence and trust.” Perhaps Herman Melville expressed it best: Americans “made the mask of Cain” and covered their countrymen’s likenesses under a veil of hatred, prejudice, and envy. Both sides came to view the other as Cain, a jealous, scheming character who kills his own brother, and saw themselves as Abel, the innocent victim who enjoys God’s favor. According to Genesis, God banished Cain east of Eden where he created new cities and nations through the threat of violence—anyone who killed him would “suffer vengeance seven times over.”

The sacred story had striking parallels in mid-nineteenth-century America. By 1860, somehow the people who were most like them, their northern countrymen, provoked white southerners’ greatest fears and sharpest contempt. Though they had come to America from the same places and had spilled blood together in the Revolution, southerners now viewed northerners as culturally alien. Though the majority in each region worked on family farms and belonged to the same economic class, southerners considered northerners socially inferior. Though they worshiped the same God, southerners saw northerners not only as morally deficient but also as evil incarnate. By obscuring major commonalities and magnifying minor differences, the mask of Cain—white southerners’ perceptions of the North—precipitated secession and war.

Disparate elements within and outside the South composed the mask. The antebellum southern economy influenced abstractions of the North in at least two ways.
First, without exaggeration, slavery made "the South," and by contrast "the North," and the sectional division between the two regions. From colonization through nationhood and territorial expansion, the South’s peculiar labor system—more than climate, ethnic, or political variations—delineated the regions. It was the major difference between countrymen who, in a global perspective, shared more than they differed.

Second, agrarian life produced close but confined worlds of daily existence that imparted a strong localism to many southerners’ perspectives. Common whites (those who filled Rebel ranks) seldom ventured beyond their neighborhood, let alone their county or state; “the counties were too large to provide the intimacy needed for the close bonds of a locality.” This condition increased southerners’ affections for home and their suspicions of outsiders or anyone who lived starkly different lives. Moreover, settlement patterns compounded this mentality. When thousands of southerners migrated closer to the frontier, they generally moved farther from population centers. The men who accomplished these arduous moves exhibited a level of personal competence that affirmed their familial authority and individualism. This sense of control over one’s sphere of possessions, and “rural isolation,” fostered an “intensely provincial” worldview in many white, southern men. Having become “masters of small worlds,” they resented meddlers who challenged their home rule.  

Antebellum southerners who traveled northward often had the affects of parochialism amplified by how alien the North seemed. Every year thousands of southerners headed north to avoid the heat, recuperate at popular springs, sightsee, or attend schools. Some of these tourists reported positive differences in the North in order to improve southern culture and economy. Others enjoyed the bustle of city life and
honored patriotic treasures like Independence Hall in Philadelphia or Faneuil Hall in Boston. But it is telling that these southerners often perceived of themselves as travelers in a foreign land. Moreover, most of the people who had the time and means to visit the North were planters and slaveholders; hence, those who were most dedicated to "the southern way of life" conveyed biased accounts of the North with both the authority of their social position and that of a first-hand witness. John Hope Franklin has noted that these travelers succeeded "in persuading those who had not been there that northern intentions toward the South were sinister and that when one dealt with the North at any level, he did so at his own peril."7

Whether southerners visited the North or not, many of them accepted the Cavalier myth, not slavery, as the explanation for sectional dichotomies. The legend claimed that opposing sides of the English Civil War settled the regions: Roundheads colonized New England and the royalists, or Cavaliers, inhabited Virginia and the Carolinas. Significantly these warring parties were also described as ethnically distinct; the Yankee–Roundhead line was Saxon and the Planter–Cavalier ancestry was Norman. Derived from different blood and settled in disparate climates, each side developed unique principles and traits. Northerners formed a leveling, industrial, enterprising society, and southerners created an aristocratic, agrarian, leisurely world reminiscent of English gentility. In 1855 William Yancey offered his version of the thesis with characteristic partisanship:

The Creator has beautified the face of this Union with sectional features. Absorbing all minor subdivisions, He has made the North and the South; the one the region of frost, ribbed with ice and granite; the other baring its generous bosom to the sun and ever smiling under its influence. The climate, soil and productions of these two grand divisions of the land, have made the character of their inhabitants. Those who occupy the one are cool, calculating, enterprising, selfish,
and grasping; the inhabitants of the other are ardent, brave and
magnanimous, more disposed to give than to accumulate, to enjoy
ease rather than labor.

Yancey’s language stamped regionalism as inevitable. In his speech the differences
between North and South were not the result of opposing economics or politics but a
product of Creation and, therefore, divinely ordained. Here the national crisis appears as
natural and unstoppable as the glaciers that had shaped northern landscapes and,
according to Yancey, its future inhabitants as well. By “absorbing all minor subdivisions”
under the aegis of sectionalism, Yancey not only fortified distinctiveness as he saw it but
 trumped national affiliations in the process.⁸

We can dismiss the Cavalier thesis as bogus genealogy but not as harmless myth.
Its ethnic explanation for regional differences was more significant than the particular
qualities it assigned to denizens of each section. The legend overshadowed the shared
legacy of the Revolution with a longer record of belligerency that divided American
ancestors not only in the English Civil War but also as Saxons versus Normans at the
Battle of Hastings eight hundred years ago. How many people knew the full extent of this
historic division is an important consideration. Nevertheless, even southerners who did
not believe they descended from near royalty received the message that northerners and
southerners were separate folk who had never seen eye-to-eye.⁹

The myth appealed to southerners because it offered them flattery, self-
absorption, and ethnography while obscuring slavery’s mark. The theory showed no
genuine interest in the North and instead used the section as a foil for southern greatness.
The story pitted the perfect Dixie, a land of honor, grace, leisure, abundance, hierarchical
harmony, and political brilliance, against the sooty North, a realm of hypocrisy, banality,
labor, avarice, social leveling, and political corruption. One side was the final citadel of chivalry; the other was the vanguard of degeneration. And, of course, southerners descended from "better stock" than northerners. Finally, by using ethnography to explain regional variance, the legend not only confirmed sectionalism (while other theories could have discounted it) but also evaded the stain of slavery. Yancey failed to note why southern Cavaliers "enjoy ease rather than labor."\textsuperscript{10}

While these developments fostered abstractions of the North, different elements in the South and the nation promoted the belligerency that turned these images into vehicles of prejudice. Here the clashes over slavery were paramount. As Eric Foner has written, "the political wars of the 1850s, centering on the issue of slavery extension, had done much to erode whatever good feeling existed between the sections." Indictments against southern morality simmered within northern debates over slavery in the territories and the comparative value of northern and southern society. This underlying slur galled a culture predicated upon honor. W. J. Cash expressed the potency of southern honor when he considered what motivated a Rebel to fight: "allow what you will for \textit{esprit de corps}, for this or for that, the thing that sent him swinging up the slope at Gettysburg . . . was before all else nothing more or less than the thing . . . which elsewhere accounted for his violence, . . . the conviction . . . that nothing living could cross him and get away with it." The roughness of southern life bred this militant defense of honor. Despite pretensions of aristocracy, much of the region remained an "agricultural frontier" that demanded grit and resourcefulness. Most southern white men were accustomed to working with their hands and settling differences with them. As more and more of these men identified the abstract North as a threat to their world, their having lived in a "fighters' fatherland," as
John Hope Franklin called the antebellum South, predisposed many of them to consider aggression an appropriate response.\textsuperscript{11}

The venomous rhetoric spouted in Congress and splashed across southern newspapers in the 1850s illustrated how severe regional divisions had become. James Hammond’s “mudsill” speech enraged the North and sold over twenty-five thousand copies in the South. Firebrands on both sides were transforming difference into grotesqueness. In 1856 a Georgia editor summed up the southern abstraction well:

Free society! we sicken at the name. What is it but a conglomeration of greasy mechanics, filthy operatives, small-fisted farmers, and moon-struck theorists? All the northern, and especially the New England states, are devoid of society fitted for well-bred gentlemen. The prevailing class one meets with is that of mechanics struggling to be genteel, and small farmers who do their own drudgery, and yet are hardly fit for association with a southern gentleman’s body servant.

Such statements split the nation as much as the substantive issues from which they drew their poison. Over time Americans had come to view each other as strangers, as contrasting others, and finally as enemies. In December 1860 Georgia Senator Alfred Iverson helped to complete this degeneration:

Sir, disguise the fact as you will, there is an enmity between the northern and southern people that is deep and enduring, and you never can eradicate it—never! You sit upon your side, silent and gloomy; we sit upon ours with knit brows and portentous scowls. . . . We are enemies as much as if we were hostile States. I believe that the northern people hate the South worse than ever the English people hated France; and I can tell my brethren over there that there is no love lost upon the part of the South.”

Once southerners considered themselves a separate people, fomenters could present nationalism not as the last resort but as the logical solution to sectional tension.\textsuperscript{12}
Secession and warfare both hardened sectional polarities and changed antebellum archetypes into more complex perceptions of the foe. When action supplanted rhetoric, it seemed to impart greater clarity. Though the South’s fate was more uncertain after secession than before it, nationhood appeared to settle things. Decisions of allegiance brought people into clearer focus: southerners became either Confederates or traitors, and northerners accepted their role as the enemy—the ultimate Other. President Lincoln’s call for troops recast the paranoid as clairvoyants; the North was conspiring to subjugate the South and revoke American freedoms. Confederate nationhood also transformed expressions of sectional enmity and discord into affirmations of patriotism and southern unity. Finally, resorting to blows heightened the significance of the times—decades of sectional arguments were about to be decided. C. E. Montague (though writing of a different conflict) captured the spirit of 1861: “the great throw, the new age’s impending nativity, Fate with her fingers approaching the veil, about to lift—a sense of these things is a drug as strong as strychnine to quicken the failing pulse of the most heart-weary of moribund raptures.”

War enthusiasm and early Confederate victories fostered an image of the northern enemy as inept and weak. Rebels inflated their own resources, talents, and resolve and underestimated their adversaries’ chances. In this climate, a man who did not indulge in bellicose boasts that he could whip ten Yankees risked being branded unpatriotic or worse, a coward. Fort Sumter and Manassas convinced many Confederates that pasty Union men were no match for their steel. The Cavalier myth seemed prophetic; northern forefathers had won the English Civil War, but southern gentlemen were righting the old wrong. In the New World, in another Civil War, grimy Yankees were crumbling before
stalwart knights of the sunny South. In the end, the triumphs of 1861–1862 compounded Confederate narcissism because these wins fostered an undying faith in certain commanders and an unconquerable mentality towards the war. Many Rebels contracted the “victory disease,” a term the Japanese used eighty years later to describe “the fatal hubris of invincibility” that consumed many of them after Pearl Harbor, Singapore, and the Philippines.  

The portrait of an inept enemy that Confederates produced from these impressions was so flexible and durable that it survived successive Rebel defeats and, in some form, even outlasted the Confederacy. The image depicted Federal armies as motley bands of weaklings, city dwellers, bounty hunters, dandies, and cowards. Bluecoats were immigrants who couldn’t speak English, mill-town boys who never owned a horse or gun, urban scum who enlisted for pay, and New England snobs who polished their buttons and boots but failed as fighters. They were unhealthy specimens shrunken by factory work who could not possibly beat legions of southern men raised in the rustic outdoors. Their motive paled in comparison as well: Yankees fought for money, Rebels strived for freedom. For many Confederates, the Army of the Potomac embodied this perception of the foe. Lincoln’s prized army was a collection of white-gloved recreants who could march in step and impress Washington socialites but withered before Rebel bullets—they were parade ground heroes and battle ground failures.

The leaders and civilians behind these blue-bellies shared their shortcomings. Northern generals and politicians, it was assumed, lacked the brains, guts, and virtue required of victors. Rebel soldiers and civilians agreed that the talent and character of Robert E. Lee, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, and P. G. T. Beauregard dwarfed their
Federal counterparts. The slew of commanders who failed to rival Lee seemed to prove northern inadequacies: it included braggarts like John Pope and Joseph Hooker, the sadly incompetent Ambrose Burnside, and George McClellan, the blood-shy general who aspired to Napoleonic stature. Their commander-in-chief, Abraham Lincoln, appeared apish, comical, and completely outmatched by Jefferson Davis, the Mexican War hero and former Secretary of War. The Cavalier myth besmirched northern politicians as shylocks and war profiteers and transmuted southern politicians into patricians, statesmen and great orators. Finally, northern civilians were thin-blooded, half-hearted supporters who would wilt when death tolls swelled or the economy swooned. These sketches of the foe encouraged disrespect more than hatred, and many Confederates responded by severely underestimated the genuineness of northern convictions and Federals’ resolve to fight for them. The Rebel delusion proposed that such a divided, distracted, and inept enemy could never beat an honorable people as committed to independence and nationhood as Confederates were.\(^{15}\)

But the enemy evinced another image that was not laughable; Federals were also invading hordes. War is terrifying, and even a people as self-confident and self-absorbed as the Confederates shivered at the specter of thousands of foes traversing southern mountain passes, coastlines, and valleys. Some Rebels imagined this nightmare at the war’s inception when Lincoln called for thousands to quell the Rebellion. As the conflict intensified, these wraiths materialized throughout the region, and a barbaric view of the adversary gained currency. While the caricature of an inept foe promoted contempt and ridicule for the other side, the figure of a savage enemy evoked fear and hatred. Because the former image was fallible, it retained northerners’ humanness. The base designs of
the latter figure, however, could depict the northern enemy as demonic, subhuman, or inhuman.

Numberless, mercenary thugs filled with southern loot and a lust for southern women composed the minions of this image. If the Army of the Potomac and its carousel of commanders represented the inept foe, Sherman and his grim, unstoppable force embodied the brutal nemesis. Like pestilence, these dusty-blue columns seemed to take everything of value (including slaves) and leave want and destruction in their wake. Their targets seemed to be women, children, and old people, and not armed Confederates. Because such behavior disregarded the rules of chivalrous warfare, these men appeared as demons, vandals, heathens, and animals. Worse still was the foreboding that endless reserves just like them waited at home for their chance to despoil Dixie.

Confederates imagined the leaders of these henchmen as unfeeling warlords, volatile fanatics, or worse. Ulysses Grant was “The Butcher” and Benjamin Butler was “The Beast.” Rebels suspected that if Lincoln were a buffoon, a cabal of New England abolitionists could be controlling him. Others portrayed Lincoln as Satan himself. Either way, Yankee rulers harbored evil plans behind a façade of reunion and emancipation. For many Confederates, restoring the Union seemed a northern excuse to pillage and subjugate the South. Likewise, freeing the slaves really meant the elevation of blacks over whites, miscegenation between Yankee troops and slave wenches, and the raping of southern ladies by freedmen and Negroes in blue uniforms. These visions formed Confederates’ fears of defeat; they represented a fate not worth living for.

Though the barbaric conception of the foe shared some elements with the Cavalier myth, it drew many of its images from other sources. Reid Mitchell has argued that
Confederates adapted the brutal figure from stock villains of the American past. Sketching a savage enemy mirrored Americans' apprehensions of Indian braves and articulated Rebel fears that Federals, like the Indians, threatened women and children. Framing Union soldiers as mercenaries harked back to old republican suspicions of the professional soldier/automaton as "the pliant tool of despotism" and expressed Confederate anxieties that the bluecoats would do anything for pay. In other words, both pictures conveyed an invaded people's terror that foes would use warfare to commit monstrous crimes: savages, by definition, did not know the rules of civilized warfare, and automatons would ignore laws when ordered to do so. Mitchell's analysis is appealing because it highlights Confederates' belief that they were continuing, not forsaking, the American experiment. By painting Yankees with the same brush colonists and patriots used to mark enemies, Rebels legitimized themselves as the true heirs of the spirit of 1776.16

Like the inept image of foemen, the menacing conception also grew through Confederate self-absorption and the tendency to draw Manichean polarities between "us" and "them." The partisanship of warfare often encourages people, regardless of their culture, to view the enemy as crude, brutish opponents. John Dower identified similar "patterns of contrariness" in images of the enemy created by the Americans and the Japanese during the Pacific War: "each side portrayed the other as its polar opposite: as darkness opposed to its own radiant light." Moreover, by creating a heathen foe, Rebels declared their nation's superiority over the North's pretensions to higher culture and loftier war aims. Just as barbarians had sacked Rome, overrunning a glorious civilization,
once again northern hordes had trespassed the borders of the world’s finest culture and threatened its existence.\textsuperscript{17}

Finally, in the Confederate mind, perceptions of the enemy as inept adversaries and terrifying minions were not binary entities but overlapping and fluid images. Though they connoted some incongruous characteristics (one figure was weak, the other strong), the portrayals also reinforced each other (both were inferior beings). Likewise, Yankee avarice motivated both caricatures: the inept foe indulged in war profiteering to his own demise; the barbaric adversary volunteered in order to plunder the South. This compatibility is most evident in Rebel discourse and media that managed to transmit both perceptions concurrently.

Confederates expressed weak and terrible images of the other side in everyday speech and propaganda. The most common names used for the Federals, including “Yankee,” “barbarian,” other savage monikers, and even “the enemy,” spread Rebels’ perceptions of the North. For many soldiers, the term “Yankee” encapsulated the pathetic foe. Confederates continued to label northerners Yankees out of habit. The term lumped all foes into a caricature of New Englanders as hypocritical reformers, cold industrialists, meddling money-grubbers, and self-righteous Puritans. Branding men from Maine to Minnesota, regardless of their accent, vocation, or ethnicity, as Yankees perpetuated the Cavalier myth’s message that Yankees were the natural-born adversaries of everything southern. Only race could discount a northern soldier from being a Yankee, for African American troops were seldom called Yankees or even black Yankees. For Rebels, Yankees were white opponents who represented their mirror opposite, the warped and
alien others who had forsaken the Revolution and threatened southern existence. Yankees embodied Cain, the murderous brother.  

To demonize the enemy, Rebels elicited savage and racist monikers, including “barbarian,” “vandal,” “abolitionist,” and “miscegenator.” In May 1864 Dunbar Affleck’s mother told him how proud she was “to think of our child—(child of our hearts you will always be to us though arrived at manhood’s stature) gone forth to battle—not with the world—for a position or livelihood but for our homes, with the vilest foe the sun ever shown on which makes the sacrifice the greater.” Thomas Key wrote his wife that he yearned “to sweep from the face of the earth the base and amorous race of Puritans which has so degraded itself and villified and slandered the Southern ladies.” He often called the enemy “misceginators,” because of his conviction that miscegenation was “the new doctrine which has gained such popularity in Yankeedom since the beginning of the revolution.” The Confederate religious press also propagated these brands. Harrison Daniel has found that “the denominational newspapers referred to Northerners as barbarians—modern-day Vandals, Huns, and Goths—who were seeking to gratify their 'hellish lusts' at the expense of Southern womanhood. On one occasion a religious newspaper printed the letter of a soldier-minister who argued that it was one's religious duty to try to cut the throats of the 'monstrous' Northerners.”

Even a term as simple as “the enemy” aided abstractions through language. Scholar J. Glenn Gray has noted the term’s diverse connotations; “ranging all the way from a purely formal designation of a military adversary to the emotional expression of greatest detestation.” Rebels referred to all Federal troops as “the enemy” regardless of their rank or other distinctions, because soldiers understood that any foe could kill them
at any time. These basic circumstances (and grammar) encouraged men to use the
definite article when referring to Federals. As Gray has explained, the opposition is
“probably not more unified than is our side and possesses many other characteristics than
those that are hostile to us,” but a reference to the enemy conjures an image of faceless
masses, or even an elemental force, whose sole purpose is malevolence. Moreover, by not
designating them as an enemy or our enemy, discourse fosters the attitude that the
adversaries menace all humanity—it is implied that the rest of the world sees the conflict
as “we” do and would strike out against the threat if necessary. Though Confederates
used the term without reflection, some of them noted how General Lee referred to the
Federals as “those people,” a more empathetic term.20

Cartoons, a medium that claims to offer truths through simplified, imaginative
sketches and commentaries, thrived on perceptions of the enemy. Southern illustrations
that stressed northern incompetence depicted Lincoln as inexperienced and quixotic. In
February 1863 the Southern Illustrated News printed a particularly effective cartoon titled
“Master Abraham Lincoln Gets a New Toy.” Instead of as a patriarch, Lincoln appears as
an ugly, awkward brat who has discarded his old dolls (representing previous
commanding Generals Winfield Scott, Irwin McDowell, John Freemont, Nathaniel
Banks, John Pope, Ambrose Burnside, and George McClellan) in favor of a new one,
General “Fighting Joe” Hooker. Shelves stacked with the discarded dolls and Lincoln’s
foolish grin as he holds up his new toy general illustrate both the wooden ineffectiveness
of Union generals and the boyish immaturity of the president’s leadership. A blank
“Proclamation” on the wall mocks the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation.21
A similar drawing by Adalbert Johann Volck, the Confederacy’s finest cartoonist, depicted Lincoln as a jester presenting the Union war effort as a puppet show. The ridiculously garbed Lincoln introduces the war effort in Shakespearean style and admits that it is a comedy: “Your honours[,] players . . . are come to play a pleasant comedy. . . . Is it a Comedy . . . a Christmas Gambol or a turning trick[?] . . . No my Lord it is more pleasing stuff. . . . it is a kind of history.” A banner at the base of the stage advertises: “great American tragedians, comedians, clowns and rope dancers in their favorite characters.” These great performers are Lincoln’s cabinet members and generals reduced to puppet stature. Some of their poses are particularly clever: General Benjamin Butler slumps in the background holding a whiskey jug, Secretary of War Simon Cameron (a notorious grafter) hangs from his own string, and a puppet of a common soldiers lies dead and alone on stage-right. Secretary of the Treasure Salmon Chase mans the box-office window and a skeleton raises the curtain. Such men would be no match for Confederate leaders.22

Because the northern press was openly critical of Lincoln and the Union war effort, northern artists drew hundreds of cartoons depicting incompetence in Washington. In fact the range, volume, and regularity of northern magazines outmatched southern periodicals to such a degree that Confederates may have relied on northern cartoons more than Rebel ones. In August 1863, Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper printed “The Naughty Boy Gotham, Who Would Not Take The Draft,” a commentary on the New York City draft riot. The artist personifies the city as a churlish child in a high chair who tosses his food labeled “draft” at Lincoln, his startled mother in a dress and bonnet. A girl identified as Philadelphia sulks in the background. Confederates interpreted the draft riots
and such northern depictions of them as signs of the enemy’s internal deterioration and impending collapse.\textsuperscript{23}

Volck’s best cartoons propagated evil stereotypes of the enemy. In an 1863 drawing, Lincoln drafts the Emancipation Proclamation in a room filled with satanic symbols. A tiny demon holds his inkwell, hoofed feet adorn the table legs, and a vulture’s head keeps the curtain open. Racism charges the image as well. A portrait of John Brown and a scene of the slave revolt in St. Domingo decorate the wall. In the second painting, naked blacks impale men, stab babies, and carry off women. The table is carved with horned heads of African Americans. Volck hints at cowardice with a Scottish cap that covers a Union sculpture and a liquor decanter. In the center a scowling Lincoln scribbles away with one foot on the Constitution.\textsuperscript{24}

While Volck’s work associated Lincoln and the Union with Satan’s forces, other drawings depicted Lincoln as the Devil himself. These cartoons and others that dehumanized the North represented the most extreme pictorial abstractions of the enemy. \textit{Southern Punch} printed an illustration of Lincoln as “the Prince of Darkness,” because Satan was “the first to Rebel against constituted authority.” The irony of seceded Rebels painting Lincoln black for his constitutional transgressions was lost on the artist and probably on his readers too. In the scene a dark Lincoln devil abducts Lady Liberty and leads her to his “infernal regions.” As they fly above a thunderstorm, the goddess pleads, “Monster of Perdition, let me go!” “Never!,” Lincoln replies, “You have been preaching about the Constitution too long already.” An artless caricature from the \textit{Southern Illustrated News} perhaps captured perceptions of the enemy best. Titled “Masks and Faces,” the drawing shows “King Abraham before and after issuing the Emancipation
Proclamation.” A towering figure reveals the face of Satan hidden behind a mask of Lincoln. The Proclamation rests at its feet, and the scaffolding atop the unfinished Washington monument resembles gallows. These cartoons that claimed to reveal the enemy’s face with caricatures achieved the opposite result; wartime illustrations masked complex, human adversaries and encouraged a partisan viewpoint that obscured the war.²⁵

While cartoons visually relayed perceptions of the enemy, camp songs and Confederate ballads delivered the same images in song. Music glorified the new nation and demarcated its battle lines by simplifying the issues and stakes involved. Odes pervaded the soldiers’ experiences: they wooed men to volunteer, entertained them in camp, sustained them on the march, and consoled them before battle. As one such ballad explained: “Voice after voice caught up the song, Until its tender passion Rose like an anthem, rich and strong—Their battle-eve confession.” Soldiers even sang to calm their nerves within the din of combat. The popularity of this music reflected both the sentimentalism of the times and soldiers’ search for meaning, comfort, and pleasure in a dreary world.²⁶

Confederate ballads that called men to arms used both images of the enemy as mighty and weak to great effect. On 4 July 1861 the newly recruited Kirk’s Ferry Rangers held a barbecue in Catahoula, Louisiana, to celebrate their creation. After ladies presented a flag to the unit, a glee club sang “Confederate Song,” an anthem written for the men by their Captain, E. Loyd Wailes. The ballad warned the troops that “Northern Vandals tread our soil, / Forth they come for blood and spoil, / To the homes we’ve
gained with toil, / Shouting ‘Slavery!’” The slavery Wailes wrote of was a Yankee vow
to enslave white southerners, not an exclamation against black bondage.\(^{27}\)

Verses that depicted a Federal onslaught with lurid detail could have sobered
Confederates to the odds they faced, but the songs intended and achieved a different
result; terror heightened both the urgency of the call and the heroism of those who
answered it. By representing the enemy as countless and ghastly, these ballads valorized
Confederate regiments as bands of boys willing to oppose a nightmarish force with
gallant but mortal hearts. As one song exclaimed to the soldiers: “The South! / She needs
no ramparts, No lofty towers to shield; / Your bosoms are her bulwarks strong,
Breastworks that never yield!” Early war enthusiasm and the romanticism of the age
encouraged these naïve images of boyish heroes stopping endless legions of darkness.\(^{28}\)

By darkening Dixie’s borders with hordes of coarse, hireling scum eager to steal
southern land and women, the songs presented men with two honorable options, victory
or death. “The Southern Cross,” sung to “The Star Spangled Banner,” vilified “the
Puritan demon” and envisioned Rebels “with our front to the field, / swearing never to
yield, / Or return, like the Spartan, / in death on our shield.” In “We Conquer or Die,”
James Pierpont explained, “the war drum is beating, prepare for the fight, / The stern
bigot Northman exults in his might, / Gird on your weapons, your foemen are nigh; / Let
this be our watchword, ‘We conquer or die!’” Likewise, the tune “Call, All! Call All!”
did just that; it included all southerners in a sacrificial effort for independence: “shoulder
to shoulder, son and sire! / All, call all! To the feast of fire! / Mother and maiden, and
child and slave, / A common triumph or a single grave.”\(^{29}\)
By focusing on the enemy as hellish invaders, these songs also justified Confederate independence and the killing of former countrymen. As a verse of “Southern Song of Freedom” explained:

The invaders rush down from the North,
Our borders are black with their hordes;
Like wolves for their victims they flock,
While whetting their knives and their swords.
Their watchword is “Booty and Beauty,”
Their aim is to steal as they go;
But Southrons act up to your duty,
And lay the foul miscreants low.

Few forms of media transmitted the range of evil archetypes Confederates used for the enemy as widely and with as much imagination. The enemy appear in these songs as “Yankee despots,” “foul mudsills,” “rowdies, thieves, vagabonds,” “bootblacks, tinkers,” “black-guards,” “Northern scum,” “Vandals,” “Hessians,” “hellish gnomes,” “wild fanatic men,” and “ruffian hordes.” Such language encapsulated the terror of an invaded region and introduced images of the enemy to Rebel soldiers before their baptism of fire. The message was unmistakable: kill or be killed, defend your loved ones or watch them perish; an absolute threat requires a universal response.30

Songs that presented an evil foe also elevated Rebels through contrasts. A Manichean bifurcation was at work here: the darker the invaders seemed, the more radiant the defenders felt. In some ballads the comparisons were explicit: “they’re hired by their master, ‘Abe’—You fight for Liberty.” Another song struck the same chord: “For gold let Northern legions fight, / Or plunder’s bloody gain; / Unbribed, unbought, our swords we draw, / To guard our homes, to fence our law, / Nor shall their edge be vain.” In “Southrons” Catherine M. Warfield addressed the enemy about Confederate superiority:
You have no such blood as theirs
For the shedding:
In the veins of cavaliers
Was its heading:
You have no such stately men
In your 'abolition den,'
To march through foe and fen
Nothing dreading!
They may fall before the fire of your legions,
Paid with gold for murderous hire—
Bought allegiance;
But for every drop you shed,
You shall have a mound of dead,
So that vultures may be fed
In our regions!\(^{31}\)

Countless tunes claimed superiority for the Confederacy in three elements that were sacred to white southerners: blood, cause, and valor.

But not all songs presented a terrifying enemy, and those that belittled the Federals served the Confederacy just as well. If images of horrific demons could compel men to join the army by appealing to their country's needs and their notions of heroism or honor, portraits of weak opponents emboldened southern men with promises that the war would be an adventure, not a nightmare, and the foe would be laughable, not terrifying.

"Call All! Call All!" exemplifies the belittling approach with references to the enemy as small animals and "Doodles": "Whoop! The Doodles have broken loose, / Roaring round like the very deuce! / Lice of Egypt, a hungry pack, / After 'em, boys, and drive 'em back. / Bull-dog, terrier, cur, and fice [sic], / Back to the beggarly land of ice; / Worry 'em, bite 'em, scratch and tear / Everybody and everywhere." By dehumanizing the enemy so explicitly, the songwriter implies that killing the foe would be as easy as squashing a bug: "Want a weapon? / Gather a brick, / Club or cudgel, or stone or stick; / Anything with a blade or butt, / Anything that can cleave or cut. / Anything heavy, or
hard, or keen! / Any sort of slaying machine! / Anything with a willing mind, / And the steady arm of a man behind. / Want a weapon? / Why, capture one! Every Doodle has got a gun, / Belt and bayonet, bright and new; / Kill a Doodle, and capture two."

In “The Old Rifleman,” Frank Ticknor belittles the foe by evoking the backwoods nonchalance of American folklore. Like David Crockett and other legendary heroes, Ticknor’s old rifleman brushes aside the northern threat with natural courage and years of experience. The fellow grabs his buckskin suit, powder pouch, flint, and, of course, “Old Bess” to “see if seventy-six can shoot / As sixteen used to do.” Just as Reid Mitchell has noted, Ticknor connected the Federals to the stock villains of the American past: speaking to “Old Bess,” the rifleman exclaims, “We’ve seen the red-coat Briton bleed! / The red-skin Indian, too! / We never thought to draw a bead on Yankee-doodle doo!” Though shocked and saddened by the fact that northern countrymen have forsaken the common experiences and collective glory the sections had won together, the old soldier has a chilling solution for the “meddling” Federal: “There’s only this to do: / Select the black spot in his eye and let the daylight through!”

Ticknor’s “Old Rifleman” carried venom that coursed through many war ballads. Some of this hatred was fueled by racism and disgust for abolitionism. In “Justice Is Our Panoply,” the writer told Federal soldiers: “Pretend love for negroes / Incites you to the strife; / Well, come each Yankee white man, / And take a negro wife. / You’d make fit black companions, / Black heart joined to black skin; / Such unions would be glorious— / They’d make the Devil grin.” Others, like “The Battle-field at Manassas,” expressed gall that Yankees were invading their soil: “Though their bodies taint the air, / And become the vulture’s fare, / It is just such invading hordes should die.” Still others seemed
animated by fears of defeat. “Southern Sentiment” denied the Confederates will ever
rejoin the Union: “Sooner by far would we yield to the grave, / Than form an alliance
with so hated a foe; / To join the ‘old Union’ would be to enslave / Ourselves, our
children, in want and in woe! / What! sons of the South! submit to be ruled / By the
minions of Abraham Lincoln, the fool? / Our fair ones insulted—our wealth all controlled
/ By Yankees, free Negroes, and every such too!”

Revenge for Federal atrocities, real or imagined, inspired the greatest expressions
of hatred. S. Teakle Wallis wrote one of the strongest songs of vengeance, “The
Guerillas,” while a prisoner of war and sent it to the printers of the Richmond Examiner
in the hands of a paroled comrade. The ballad begins with “a friend” reporting atrocities
to a group of Confederate irregulars. First the passerby details how the enemy was
harming defenseless civilians: “From the far-off conquered cities / Comes a voice of
stifled wail, / And the shrieks and moans of the houseless / Ring out, like a dirge on the
gale. / I’ve seen from the smoking village / Our mothers and daughters fly; / I’ve seen
where the little children / Sank down in the furrows to die.” Then the narrator stirred
racist fears: “They are turning the slaves upon us, / And with more than the fiend’s worst
art, / Have uncovered the fire of the savage, / That slept in his untaught heart! / The ties
to our hearths that bound him, / They have rent with curses away, / And maddened him,
with their madness, / To be almost as brutal as they.” Finally, the reporter evoked the
heresy of northern churchmen: “With halter, and torch, and Bible, / And hymns to the
sound of the drum, / They preach the gospel of murder, / And pray for lust’s kingdom to
come.” As a response to these atrocities, the traveler and the guerillas swore an oath: “By
the graves where our fathers slumber, / By the shrines where our mothers prayed, / By
our homes, and hopes, and freedom, / Let every man swear on his blade, / That he will not sheathe nor stay it, / Till from point to hilt it glow / With the flush of Almighty vengeance, / In the blood of the felon foe."^35

*Abstractions of the Enemy and the Soldiers’ World, 1864–1865*

In the soldier’s world, where Rebels and their perceptions of the enemy met the actual foe, abstractions not only survived but thrived. For a number of reasons, Confederates who suffered war’s horrors with the Federals could not and did not replace caricatures of Yankees with more complex, realistic portrayals of the other side. On occasion, troops expressed respect for northern adversaries, but denigrating the opposition was too central to the process of warfare for soldiers to give it up. In 1864-1865, many conditions, some unique to the soldiers’ lives and others common to the white South, perpetuated abstractions of the enemy. Generalizations simplified the chaos and justified the costs of war. Moreover, Union armies validated Rebel caricatures by introducing three features in the final campaigns that were tailor-made for the enemy’s images of them: total warfare, black soldiers, and trenches. These developments, the soldier’s need for psychological distance from his target, and the demands of nationalism and civil war sustained simplistic views of northerners to the end of the war.^36

Abstractions of the enemy translated war’s enormous forces and intricate variables into a comprehensible scale of simpler oppositions. Stemming from this need to simplify the movements of thousands, many Confederates abstracted forces by crediting all actions and motives to the general in charge. This habit of reduction is evident in countless diaries and letters: “Grant had left our front”; “General Lee did not fall back”;
“as soon as Grant commenced to move Lee commenced also”; “Grant seems to be nearer whipped than before the battles”; “Grant is building a railroad. . . . Lee will not allow it.” Convenience persuaded these soldiers to express the war in such terms, but like the label “the enemy,” this discourse spawned unintended connotations.37

Imputing the performance of thousands to one man helped Confederates degrade opposing leaders and the entire enemy by association. Any hasty retreat by bluecoats, every prisoner who criticized his officers, and all unburied Yankees were marks against Generals Ulysses Grant or William Sherman. After a month of continual contact with Grant’s army, Philip Collins figured the enemy was beaten: “from all accounts the yankees are pretty badly whipped now and if they dont mind they will bee whipped wors than they hav ever been.” To support his assessment, Collins noted, “Grant leaves his dead on the battle field to rot . . . on top of the ground. I hav seen a great many of them myself after they had decayed so much that the flesh had left their faces.” This sign of disrespect and other breaches of “civilized” warfare, such as trampled crops, burned homes, or shelled churches, were stains on a general’s character that confirmed Rebels’ opinion of the foe and his warlords. For Fred Fleet, Grant’s order to destroy anything of military value in the Shenandoah Valley “stamps Grant as an unmitigated scoundrel, and henceforth he will be classed in the same category with Butler-the-Beast and Sherman.” When Sherman ordered the expulsion of all disloyal southerners from Atlanta and refused to exchange prisoners, Louisiana artillerist James Adams spouted that such conduct “shows the true Yankee trickery of those inhuman vandals.”38

This habit of reducing armies to their generals also elevated Confederate generals through Manichean comparisons. For many soldiers, Generals Robert E. Lee and Joe
Johnston seemed as brilliant and noble as Grant and Sherman appeared stupid and brutal. As one trooper put it, "Grant, great as he is thought to be by the Northern Fanatics, is no more a match for our Noble Lee, than an Ethiopian." Many Rebels viewed enormous campaigns as chess matches between these generals and predictably forecasted Confederate victories. Before the spring campaigns of 1864, James Brannock admitted that the soldiers "have every confidence that Generals Johnston & Lee are wide awake & will be ready to meet them." James Bates agreed: "I have no fears of Lee & Johnson being out generated." After seven weeks of the Overland campaign, William Casey still blithely predicted, "Genl Lee will put the Yanks all right on this side of the James." Meanwhile in Georgia, thousands of Rebels retained confidence in Johnston despite retreating ever closer to Atlanta, because as one of them put it, Sherman "is too far from home and runs counter to sixty-five thousand muskets . . . and a hundred percentum more of brains than he can bring to bear."  

Viewing the campaigns as duels fostered overconfidence in Lee and Johnston, because this one-on-one mentality promoted an illusion of parity. Concentrating on the opposing generals conveniently ignored disparities in manpower, provisions, ordnance, transportation, and other essentials that separated the contending armies. A more accurate metaphor would have pitted two or three Grants against Lee and two Shermans against Johnston or Hood. The illusion of parity affected Edgeworth Bird's assessment of the 1864 campaign: "Lee's army is now greatly strengthened, and it is probable he will resume the offensive. He must be nearly equal to the enemy in point of numbers, and Grant has before him an impossible task. He cannot take Richmond."
In most cases, however, illusions of dueling generals offered comfort but did not erase soldiers’ awareness of grim disparities. After a month of carnage in Virginia, Charles Blackford wrote home that Grant “has lost fifty thousand men and Lee and his army are before him, full of fight and unconquerable.” But within a few lines, Blackford admitted, “in one respect only has [Grant’s] campaign been a success: to kill and wound so many of his men required a loss on our part at least one-fourth of his, and he is a hundred times better able to stand it. *We are being conquered by the splendor of our own victories*, and Grant accepts defeat with that consolation.” Few insights illuminated the fate of the Confederacy as well as this one did, but an avalanche of optimistic (albeit misleading) information combined with faith, narcissism, daily discourse, and other subtle influences to downplay bleak realities. Confederates did not translate chaotic warfare into a match of opposing generals to hide from the facts, but the illusion of parity affected their outlook nonetheless.  

Few actions confirmed Rebels’ abstractions of the enemy and deepened their animosity for Federals as much as did the total war strategies practiced by Generals Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan in the campaigns of 1864–1865. Overwhelming legions of Yankees trampling crops, wrecking railroads, burning homes, freeing slaves, stealing valuables, and leveling cities actualized white southerners’ greatest fears of the enemy. Marching past Sheridan’s work in the Shenandoah, Creed Davis exclaimed, “the Yankees left their mark of fire behind them, Having burned all the forage and barns on the pike. What a mode of war-fare for a civilized people.” J. Tracy Power has noted that Lee’s men referred to the enemy as “vandals” and “miscreants” with greater regularity after Sheridan’s campaign. Across the Mississippi, William Heartsill also witnessed “the hand
of a more savage foe.” “Our camp is the ruins of a magnificent plantation, with one broad sweep of the destroyers hand, . . . a widow Lady is houseless, homeless and a beggar, Houses, Negroes, Furniture, Stock, Cotton; all gone, and by whom?” he asked. “By the GREAT United States.” Heartsill slept “amidst a perfect forrest of blackened chimneys.” Similar vistas seared Rebels’ images of the enemy throughout the South.42

Yet, the impact of this desolation might have been greater on soldiers who did not witness it first hand. Anxieties for loved ones and ghastly rumors dogged the minds of far-off veterans. From Richmond, in November 1864, Georgian Edgeworth Bird had “no doubt the hated swarm of Yankees have passed over” his home. One of the Army of Tennessee exclaimed, “citizens that live between here and Dalton sometimes come to us and say that the Yanks treat our people back there as mean as they can. . . . My God what will become of us[?]” The validity of some reports could not be denied. In June 1864 one of Charles Blackford’s comrades received ominous mail from his sister: “She says the enemy has been at his father’s and have done them an infinite amount of harm. They took all the negroes, all the meat and chickens and broke open every lock in the house and stole everything they could carry away which would be of any use to them or their families. . . . They have nothing to eat but flour out of new wheat and such vegetable as the yankees have not stolen.” Implausible accounts also bothered soldiers, because they addressed the gravest fears. Just weeks before his surrender, Richard Maury read newspapers “full of details of the Yankees vilanous treatment of the people of North and South Carolina – outrages of the most scandalous character are openly perpetrated by officers and men upon the harmless ladies and beautiful females who may fall into their hands.” Deserting was a common response to such stories; deepening hatred for the
perpetrators was another. When he received word that some childhood friends had been imprisoned and sentenced to death for desertion, Reuben Pierson marveled how any man "could not protect an aged parent or a loving sister from the abuses of the rabble" by remaining dutiful soldiers. For Pierson and thousands more, sustaining the Confederate ranks was the only way to protect people at home; without the armies there was no country and, hence, no defense against northern aggression.43

Of all the actions they witnessed, the shelling of Petersburg particularly galled Lee's men, because they lacked the strength to silence the barrage and suffered to watch it. Paul Higginbotham wrote his brother after a day of "terrible cannonading": "the Yankee batteries . . . are plenty close to tear the town to pieces," he lamented. Within days, tents and pine board shelters dotted the ground around Charles Blackford and the First Corps Headquarters—citizens were clinging to the army for protection. "Many of these people [are] of some means and all [are] of great respectability," Blackford observed, meaning they were white southerners and infinitely finer than the soldiers who fired on their homes. "Yesterday, about the time they thought the people were going to church, [the enemy] commenced a tremendous cannonade, as if with the hope of killing women and children en route to church." Visiting the city on a twenty-four hour pass, John Walters found fires burning in four places. "These were caused by the incendiary shell that the enemy were throwing," he concluded. "As the smoke of these fires rose in the air they presented an excellent mark for the enemy, and they were not slow to avail themselves of it."44

Federal total war policies fed an already flourishing genre of Confederate propaganda, the atrocity story. Just retaliation for atrocities, real or imagined, had
motivated belligerents on both sides from the war’s inception. In the first year of the conflict, the northern press accused Rebels of shooting at ambulances, bayoneting the wounded, and poisoning wells. The purported treatment of Federal corpses was even worse: Confederates cut off their heads, boiled their meat, and made souvenirs and utensils from their bones. Rebels responded with myths of equal severity. According to southern reports, the Yankees bayoneted and shot Rebel prisoners, slit the throats and cut out the tongues of Confederate wounded, and even fired at southerners while they helped wounded Federals caught between the lines. Some stories suspected the Yankees of using poisoned bullets. When a report circulated that Federal cavalry had dragged a prisoner away and killed him at a range so close that gunpowder burned his flesh, Thomas Key noted, “there is some talk of raising the black flag. A few more such events and blood will flow on every hill, and every valley will be stained with it.”

By the war’s final phase, Federal actions and Confederate apprehensions expanded the focus of Rebel atrocity stories from the battlefield to the home front. The religious press printed accounts of Federal soldiers beating civilian men and raping their wives and daughters. While Sherman’s army tramped through Georgia, cavalryman John Cotton was convinced that “the yankees are destroying everything before them and ravishing women[;] the citizens are fleeing from them like chaff before the wind.” Most accounts of sex or rape involved blacks. James Silver has noted that a “sure-fire method of creating a feeling of disgust for the Yankees” was to depict them in “captured cities parading up and down the streets with Negro women on their arms.” Stories of black soldiers or slaves raping white women produced the greatest loathing. Malinda Taylor wrote her husband, a soldier in the Army of Tennessee that “there was a Negro burnt to
death in Eutaw the other day for taking a white lady off of her horse and doing what he pleased with her. Mrs. Godwin was thare and saw the smoke.” Similar accounts of miscegenation emanated from occupied Atlanta. Thomas Key reacted to one within weeks of Malinda Taylor’s story:

My ambulance driver, who had been bringing out the exiled women and children from Atlanta, returned today and gave a gloomy story of the demoralization, or rather at the disgusting equalization of the whites and blacks under Sherman. A trustworthy lady told him that the day before she departed from Atlanta a big black negro man went to one of the most respected young ladies in the city and offered her $10 if she would come to his tent and spend the night with him. The thought of such an occurrence arouses every nerve in my body for vengeance, and I feel like crying: ‘Raise the black flag and let slip the dogs of war.’

Whether true or false, these stories vitalized Rebel images of invading hordes and muddied the delineations between legitimate acts of war, crimes, and myths. Because Confederates abstracted Federal soldiers as a universal, stereotypical foe, the crimes of individual Unionists reflected not the faults of those persons but the barbarity and cowardice of the undifferentiated enemy. Consequently, Rebels were not overly concerned with bringing to justice the actual perpetrators of an atrocity—any Yankees would do.46

This mentality made any foe a legitimate target of vengeance, including Unionist citizen of the South, Pennsylvania farmers, and prisoners of war. Moreover, atrocities seemed to unmask the enemy’s hypocrisies. Accounts of miscegenation exposed the “true” impetus behind emancipation: racial amalgamation. Reports of pillage and dominance uncovered the “actual” design for restoring the Union: subjugation of the white South. Finally, these myths, like perceptions of the enemy in general, affected how Confederates viewed themselves and the war. Atrocity stories reified the Confederates’
self-image as innocent victims, as an oppressed, besieged, and violated minority
deserving of independence and free of guilt. War correspondent and intellectual Michael
Ignatieff has asserted, “people who believe themselves to be victims of aggression have
an understandable incapacity to believe that they too have committed atrocities. Myths of
innocence and victimhood are a powerful obstacle in the way of confronting
responsibility, as are atrocity myths about the other side.”

Quets for vengeance and retribution inspired many Rebels through the war’s
final period. In July 1864 Thomas Elder was anxious to hear if the enemy had raided his
home. He redirected his anxiety when his unit surprised a Federal force that was
responsible for some destruction near Petersburg: “on their return they came to grief. Our
forces both infantry and cavalry went down the railroad . . . and headed the scoundrels
off. We captured all their artillery, ambulances, some of their wagons and caused them to
burn the rest. Also about 500 negroes of all sizes ages and descriptions and a large
number of white prisoners. The Yankees were completely routed. . . . Our troops are in
good spirits.” In the abandoned section of Petersburg, John Walters admitted, “the
unchristian hope will rise that, should our armies succeed in capturing any of the
Northern cities, a full retribution may be meted out to them, for only by that means can
they be taught the horrors through which this glorious old Commonwealth is struggling to
her freedom.” General Jubal Early fulfilled Walters’s wish when his army plundered and
burned Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, in August 1864. The news pleased Walters:

I am glad that at last our generals are laying aside a little
of their Christian forbearance, and by inaugurating a stern
system of retaliation, are fighting the enemy with weapons
with which they have fought us for the last three years.
Possibly the blazing roofs of Chambersburg may induce the
people of the North to look at this war in an entirely different
light from that wherein they have been accustomed to view it. Well done, General Jubal A. Early! Oh! for the power to whisper in your ear that Pittsburgh is also in Pennsylvania.

Edgeworth Bird also applauded the destruction of a town devoid of military value. He considered Chambersburg’s fate a just retribution: “Pennsylvania has burning homesteads and desolate wives. The beautiful town of Chambersburg is a black, charred mass. There is retribution at last. We all recall the defiant and scornful faces of its ladies as we marched through a year ago. I then and still respect them for their spirit, but their scorn has turned into wailing.”

The emancipation and enlistment into the Federal army of thousands of former slaves further enraged Confederates and verified their perceptions of Yankees. Just as Lincoln’s call for troops had affirmed white southerners’ suspicions that northerners were hostile to them, his Emancipation Proclamation confirmed their fear that Yankees were ruthless fanatics. Many Rebels believed blacks were victims, not benefactors, of the Federals’ actions: deceitful Yankees freed slaves to provide labor and cannon fodder for the northern war effort and intended to jettison them to an existence worse than slavery once the war concluded. Edgeworth Bird told his wife, “a negro who knows what is for his good will never let the Yanks get him.” “For they will seize every one of them and enroll them in their army to meet such fates as the poor creatures at Fort Pillow and the other day at Petersburg. They force every negro man they get hold of into their army.” John Doyle thought emancipation spelled doom for the blacks and consoled a friend whose slaves had left, claiming “they will no doubt regret the day they left their comfortable homes, and kind Master and Mrs – but poor deluded things, they know not suffering is before them.” Confederates highlighted evidence of the Yankees’ disregard
for blacks. Charlie DeNoon wrote home that the enemy abandoned blacks during a hasty retreat: “little nigger babies could be found lying in the woods nearly dead, that were thrown away by the Yankees in their flight. We made the Yankee prisoners carry the little darkies that were broken down. It was an amusing sight to see the little darkies with a leg on either side of a Yankee's neck marching to Petersburg.”

Lieutenant DeNoon’s punishment suggests that Rebels enjoyed ridiculing Federals’ involvement with blacks. Thomas Key jeered the enemy with remarks, like “the Yankees marched a line of battle, composed of white negroes and black negroes.” James Brannock dreamed that Henry Ward Beecher and other abolitionists were “married to the blackest, dirtiest, stinkiest, . . . negro wench that can be found.” Henry Berkeley wished that “all the Yanks and all the negroes were in Africa.” Mocking emancipation and the enemy’s involvement with blacks or voicing concerns that freed people could not survive on their own were attempts by Confederates to sustain a waning authority over blacks.

Rebels’ pity or ridicule ended, however, when freedmen joined Federal regiments. Facing black opponents implied an equity between former slaves and Confederate soldiers that many Rebels could not stomach. Edgeworth Bird related a story that illustrates this point: “[Captain Herman H.] Perry went on the lines yesterday and exchanged a Richmond paper for a New York Herald of the 24th. . . . One of the men went afterwards and waved his paper, the usual signal for an exchange, and out walked a nigger soldier with a paper. The Confed 'cussed him out' and retired in disgust.” Other responses to black troops were far more violent. A soldier manning Lee’s trenches reported:

the yankees a people who are so fond of changing could not be contented with white men in our front, so they concluded they
would try their sable colored troops in front of our pickets, it so enraged our boys that the officers could hardly keep them from firing on them as soon as they discovered negroes in their front, there was a dispatch sent over requesting them to remove their colored troops & warning them if they did not they would be fired on, the dispatch was passed by in silent contempt so next morning at eight o'clock an order came for us to make ready to fire at the sound of the bugle which would give the signal at half past eight, in a few minutes every man was at his post with gun in hand and thumb on hammer & finger on trigger ready to pour a deadly volley into the ranks of the unsuspecting blacks who were at that time standing in groups at each pit, now every man seemed to be waiting with breathless impatience for the expected signal, at last the bugle sounded & hundreds of balls went whistling into the enemies ranks & numbers of them were launched in eternity who but a moment before were cracking merry jokes & passing their bottles of whiskey freely one from another, it made me feel very bad indeed it looked much to be cold murder.

Other Rebels showed no remorse over the murdering of blacks prisoners at Fort Pillow.

James Brannock was “glad that Forrest had it in his power to execute such swift & summary vengeance upon the negroes, & I trust it will have a good influence in deterring others from similar acts.” By killing black prisoners, Rebels revealed not only racist rage but also a chilling psychological distance from their victims.51

These massacres showed how hideous the result could be when a combination of factors, including abstractions of the enemy, racism, vengeance, and the strains of war, affected soldiers to a point where they no longer saw the foe as human beings. Moreover, Rebels understood that black soldiers were challenging racial barriers, and by murdering them, Confederates sent freedmen a message: uniform or no uniform, blacks were not equal to Confederate soldiers and did not deserve the treatment of captured adversaries. On August 1 1864 Paul Higginbotham witnessed the horrendous product of these influences at the Crater:
with a fiendish yell they charged our works, the infernal **Negroes** in front. As soon as they got on top of our works they cried our **No quarter for the d-d Rebels. Remember Fort Pillow. . . .** They would give no quarter to us and rest assured received none. Between 5 & 600 Negroes & white scoundrels now lie buried in the trenches, and in front of them several hundred more are lying there blackening Corpses in solemn warning to the survivors.

Viewing the same corpses, John Walters morbidly quipped, “but for their hair and differences of features, the whites could not be distinguished from their colored brothers.”

The trench warfare of 1864–1865 placed thousands of adversaries within rifle-shot and ear-shot for months on end. Though this physical proximity seemed to magnify the conditions of skirmish lines (where enemies sometimes fraternized), the closeness of opposing trenches intensified animosities. The constant sniping that Rebels reported confirms the antagonisms of life in the trenches. Samuel Vann vividly expressed the impact of sharp shooting “in the ditches” outside Atlanta:

> fighting has been going on very rapidly ever since I came in[to the trenches], and I have been here about four hours. While I was sitting on a log conversing with my friend Jim Anderson about five minutes ago a ball was shot into the log about four inches from me, and they are constantly falling among us. . . . I hear a ball pass by me every syllable I make, and since I have been writing there has been two men shot through the body right here in camp. Poor fellows, I think they will die. I am sitting behind a tree to prevent being shot until I get this letter wrote, and the balls are constantly striking the tree that I am behind, . . . . I may be writing to you for the last time, but I truly hope not, for I don’t want to die just yet awhile. . . . one poor fellow is out there on the ground crying to God for help.

Outside Petersburg, Edgeworth Bird’s unit lost men every day: “sharp shooting on both sides is murderously active and accurate. Yesterday, a Capt. Jones, 17th Georgia, and a
private of 2nd Georgia were passing each other in the narrow covered way of the main trenches, Each raised his head a little too high, and a ball passed though the brain of each.” Endless sniping in the trenches took on the aura of a shooting gallery in which each desensitized shooter was the other side’s dehumanized target. Knowing that the Rebels lacked adequate rations, Grant’s marksmen implemented a tactic that epitomized this blunt atmosphere: “the Yankee sharp shooters kill the town milch cows that are grazing as far as 700 yards in rear of our trenches—1100 yards from them. And then they have killed our boys who venture back to them to cutt off the beef.” Such behavior gave Confederates a new term for the foe, “assassins.”

Sniping combined with monotony and squalor to make life on the front almost unbearable. “Oh! for a long march through the valley or somewhere else where the same objects will not be the alpha and the omega of each day's existence,” wrote one defender. Being “in the muddiest most disagreeable place you can imagine” increased hatred for the enemy who pinned them there. Philosopher and World War Two veteran J. Glenn Gray conveyed why war-weary soldiers often hated the foe with greater intensity:

Are they not responsible for the hard, uncomfortable life he is forced to lead? Were it not for them he would be at home with his wife or girl friend, enjoying his favorite food or sport or other amusement. His mood may become one of deep resentment or smoldering anger against the cause of his present misery. He wants to make them pay for this long-continued disruption of his life, 'they' being not the enemy in general so much as that group opposite his position at the front. The more cramped, painful, and unbearable his physical and psychological environment becomes, the more he is likely to be filled with a burning vengeance, which demands action for its alleviation.
Constantly dreading an assault, witnessing the snipers’ toll, dodging mortars, and suffering in cramped, filthy quarters embittered men on both sides of the line. Moreover, Rebels who persisted in the trenches understood that the enemy could quit and go home without endangering his country and loved ones. Because Confederates lacked such assurances, these disparate circumstances embittered Rebels and fed a fierce determination to save Richmond and Atlanta, to out-will the Yankees.54

Finally, “the binary deadlock, the gross physical polarization of the trench predicament” reinforced dichotomous perceptions of the enemy. Paul Fussell has observed this development in the trenches of World War One: “We’ are all here on this side; ‘the enemy’ is over there. ‘We’ are individuals with names and personal identities; ‘he’ is a mere collective entity. We are visible; he is invisible. We are normal; he is grotesque.” Physical nearness to the entrenched enemy did not unmask him; earthworks hid his movements and cloaked his intentions. In other words, protracted contact with the foe increased fear of the unknown (what are they doing over there?) and produced the tensions associated with extended contact and high concentrations of troops.55

Rebels’ impressions of individual Union soldiers also exhibit how close proximity to adversaries could increase the psychological distance between friend and foe. The obvious fact that most of the Federals that Rebels observed closely were captured, wounded, or dead hints at how circumstances (and the conditions of the enemy who were in them) affected soldiers’ perceptions of the enemy. Besides an occasional expression of pity for such foemen, these encounters reinforced Confederates’ low opinion of the other side and confirmed stereotypes.
For many Rebels, enemy corpses represented the folly of Federal invasions. In June 1864 Robert Stiles found himself near Malvern Hill, “the old hill of fire & terror,” and Frazier’s Farm, “which gave me my first real view of a field after the battle fought & the victory won.” Investigating the old ground, Stiles discovered “piles of human bones—sculls bare & ghastly crunching under the horses feet & wagon wheels, & many other memorials of the former invasion & defeat.” Surveying the scene, Stiles remarked, “Grant has ever to the last followed the track of McClellan, only he does not do quite so well.” Dead Yankees seemed to mark the site of Confederate triumphs, because the adversaries left too hastily to care for their own. After artillery had repulsed the foe, William Casey “had the pleasure of seeing some of their dead lying in the ditch.” Such language bares the hardening of war. Samuel Foster noted, “we cook and eat, talk and laugh with the enemy dead lying all about us as though they were so many logs.”

Prisoners offered Confederates a unique opportunity to interrogate the enemy. The despondency and fear that affected prisoners’ demeanor seemed to confirm Rebels’ images of an inept foe. Such Yankees appeared weak, divided, shifty, critical of Federal leadership, and ethnically diverse. In March 1865 Richard Maury declared a group of 476 captives from Sherman’s army “the most villainous looking set of scoundrels that I ever saw anywhere.” “And these fellows we are assured are a fair specimen of Sherman’s forces,” he quipped. Maury was shocked and pleased to find so many of them without shoes or hats and “wretchedly clothed.” He failed to realize that poorly clad Confederates probably stole the prisoners’ articles, and even surmised that the blankets protecting their feet had been snatched from Carolinians. Moreover, the spectacle of 476 Union soldiers being marched to Libby Prison, like the sight of scores of Union dead, gave the
impression that the war was going better than it was. Such impressions especially affected men like William Heartsill who guarded prisons far from the frontlines. Stationed in Tyler, Texas, Heartsill and his unit maintained a stockade that swelled to over three times its original size in April and May 1864. On 15 April 1864, 1100 Yankees arrived from their defeat and capture at the Battle of Mansfield. Few Confederates expressed the comprehension that thousands of enemy dead and prisoners also indicated the Federals’ enormous manpower.57

Deserters also reinforced Rebel images of the foe. By stressing Rebel desertion as a cause of Confederate defeat, historians have (unintentionally) shifted our gaze away from thousands of dissatisfied Federals who deserted the winning side. In many respects Sherman and Grant’s troops suffered hardships in the final campaigns that rivaled the plight of their opponents: Grant’s ranks sustained unprecedented casualties, and Sherman’s foot-sore columns trekked hundreds of miles. Troops who abandoned the Federal cause presented a disaffected demeanor and often shared Confederates’ opinions of Federal commanders, emancipation, and the war’s progress. In May 1864 Creed Thomas reported, “Now and then some of them may be seen coming into out lines – deserting. A squad of 20 has just come in. The Yankee army is said to be very much demoralized.” In June 1864, deserters from Sherman’s ranks informed John Cotton and his comrades that the Federal army was critically short of rations, so much so that mules and horses were starving to death. After the Wilderness and Spottsylvania Court House, Union deserters who met Rueben Pierson’s unit “report their loss as being the heaviest of any battle of the war—between 50 & 75 thousand in all & over ten Gens. in all.” Some deserters informed Confederates of Federal plans and aided in the capture of
unsuspecting comrades. Others claimed that thousands of Federals would desert if given an opportunity. \(^{58}\)

Contact with Union prisoners and deserters perpetuated the Rebel myth of Federal cowardice. Bell Wiley has observed, “the overwhelming majority of Confederates remained firm to the end in the conviction that the majority of Yankees were lacking in the stuff that it takes to make good soldiers.” Rebels often discounted Federal valor by claiming Yankee prisoners were drunk. George Binford thought that Sherman’s officers “make their men drunk to assault our lines [,and] prisoners attest the fact for a great many have been taken intoxicated.” In the battle “their men were drunk and charged up within ten or twenty steps of our lines. One, a Col, came over in our ditches, too drunk to know what he was doing. These are the boldest Yanks I ever saw they dont mind charging breastworks at all, and the officers dont care much how many are killed.” John Walters agreed that the enemy’s bravery “must not be taken as an evidence of superior courage, as the men were more than half drunk.” Perhaps Federals falsely admitted to drunkenness in order to appease their captors. These motives, plus the effects of adrenaline, fear, and fatigue best explain the myth of cowardice. Whatever caused its persistence, viewing the enemy as cowards helped to sustain a belief in Rebel superiority through the final period of the conflict. \(^{59}\)

*Views of the Enemy and the War’s Outcome: The Cost of Abstractions*

Though the circumstances of war explained why foemen destroyed plantations or appeared powerless as captives, Rebels preferred to consider such actions and impressions evidence of the other side’s inherent cruelty or weakness. Confederates
treated captured, deserting, wounded, and dead Yankees as specimens that confirmed their stereotypes. Nevertheless, even if soldiers had not manipulated such encounters to prove their prejudices, total war, black troops, and trench warfare still would have deepened their animosities and solidified caricatures of foemen. It is difficult to discern when northerners most resembled the grim legions of the Confederate imagination: when their shadowy figures encircled Richmond with bristling trenches, when their columns charred the countryside and darkened southern doorways, or when their skin was black.60

Still, the blatant partisanship of many Rebels’ views of the North seems extravagant—these perspectives ignored mountains of evidence that confirmed Federal determination, courage, competence, and idealism. Perhaps civilians, whether they were distant from the real foe or victims of enemy destruction, can be pardoned for maintaining simplistic, passionate images of Yankees, but how can we excuse soldiers who still branded northerners as cowards after witnessing thousands of adversaries die bravely? In the end, regardless of all the factors that shaped these abstractions, two forces necessitated soldiers’ biased perceptions of opponents: the need for psychological distance from their victims and the nation-building process.

Abhorrence of killing, not just animosity, spurs soldiers to abstract the enemy. Prejudice and malice do not breed in complete comprehensions of people but in stereotypes, however biased they seem, and hiding the enemy’s humanness—his integrity as an individual and his bonds of affection—behind a mask of hatred enabled soldiers to kill without considering it murder. Only by denigrating, demonizing, and dehumanizing northerners could Rebels maintain their sanity against the heaps of dead men they were personally and corporately responsible for. Perhaps Confederates invented and magnified
disparities because common differences between adversaries, including language, religion, nationality, and (for the most part) race, were unavailable to them.\textsuperscript{61}

Confederate nationalism reinforced the creation and exaggeration of differences. If individual soldiers abstracted the foe to absolve themselves of murder, the whole Confederacy deprecated the Union to justify secession and independence. Michael Ignatieff’s observance that “nationalism is a distorting mirror in which believers see their simple ethnic, religious, or territorial attributes transformed into glorious attributes and qualities” also applies to how belligerents shape images of the foe. In wars, particularly civil wars, patriots brand the enemy as an ignoble opposite in order to affirm their right to be hostile and free. As the war intensified and its costs increased, Rebel enmity for the North deepened not only out of vengeance but also because the quest for nationhood required greater justification.\textsuperscript{62}

But the same elements that contributed to troops’ perceptions of the enemy also influenced how soldiers envisioned the war’s possible outcomes, and some Rebels paid a heavy price for underrating the foe so severely. Most Confederates used abstractions of the enemy as lenses through which they estimated Federal resolve and predicted scenarios of victory and defeat. Being as these abstractions presented simple, partisan views of the other side, it is no surprise that they failed to accurately represent the war’s concluding period. But because Rebels constructed and reinforced their perceptions from a multitude of sources, including antebellum archetypes, media and propaganda, illusions of parity, enemy encounters and actions, the myth of cowardice, and atrocity stories, both their abstractions of the North and their expectations for the war’s ending seemed to be reliable assessments.
Underestimations of the enemy and rumors of northern internal division fostered Confederate dreams of a looming Federal collapse. Drawing from the weak Yankee stereotype, many Rebels expected masses of thin-blooded, greedy northerners to quake at rising casualty lists or falling stock prices and demand peace. This vision of implosion was remarkable for its popularity and consistency throughout the South. Writing from Lee’s army, Rueben Pierson told his father in Louisiana, “the federals are all ready too far gone into the malestrom [sic] of financial ruin to ever return and every moment brings them nearer to the fatal whirlpool, that is to wreck their already shackling ship of state.” From his headquarters in Alabama, William Nugent predicted, “Old Grant will give us trouble and once defeated, the North will become dispirited and lose all interest in or care for the war . . . . A heavy financial crash [will] startle the Yankees from their present prosperity. When once they cease to make money out of the war, they will quit.” A soldier in the Army of Tennessee agreed: “The North is divided in sentiment and cannot prosecute the war much longer. Let Lee in Virginia and Johnston here gain decisive victories and greenbacks will almost be worthless and peace men in the North will multiply like flies in the spring.”

Many Rebels also believed that political division or financial ruin would convince the West to secede from the East. John Walters conjectured that with Lincoln’s reelection “there is a possibility of the Pacific States leaving the Old Union to form a Confederacy of their own, and in this case the Northwestern States will most probably cut loose from the Eastern, and this of itself would end the war.” William Nugent felt that “the inevitable result” of a Federal financial disaster “will be a split among themselves. The West will secede and the road [will be] cleared for Independence.” Some of these rumors started in
northern newspapers. Paul Higginbotham read in the Washington Herald, “there is some talk of Peace meetings at various places in the North, and a growing dissatisfaction with the people. They want this war to close. Prices are going up rapidly in the north now, and gold is now up to 250 and going up. Secretary Chase has resigned, and [William P.] Fessenden from Maine appointed in his place, some fellow from Ohio is in favor of Western Confederacy, & a breaking off from the New England States.”64

Forecasts for a northern collapse appealed to Confederates for various reasons. Like many Confederates’ faith that God would deliver them victory, hopes for Federal self-destruction illuminated a path to victory that did not require military triumph. Moreover, the financial trouble, political infighting, and division between East and West that appeared in Confederates’ images of northern collapse also described the Confederacy’s own internal problems. By the final phase of the war, Rebel currency was worthless, governors openly defied the president, and Union control of the Mississippi affectively split the southern nation into eastern and western halves. Perhaps Rebels wished their own headaches upon the enemy. As Edwin Fay remarked, “I want to see the Yankee nation without a Govt. enjoying what they are so fond of, a state of Anarchy and confusion.”65

Just as images of a weak foe helped to produce dreams of northern collapse, portrayals of a barbaric adversary promoted nightmares of brutal subjugation. Many Confederates considered total war campaigns and the proliferation of black troops evil portents of the South’s future should the Rebellion fail. Though Federals increased the destructiveness of their 1864-1865 campaigns to convince Rebels to surrender, total war had the opposite affect of convincing many Confederates that capitulation was worse than
death. Some soldiers received letters from parents and spouses who suffered occupation and devastation. Fred Fleet’s mother wrote him that “death is far preferable to subjugation to the vile Yankees—I know something about it now.” As the war intensified, even religious propaganda told soldiers to grasp independence or expect colonization, miscegenation, or even extermination at the hands of the brutal North.

“What will become of us if defeated?,” William Nugent asked. “Renewed trials, greater difficulties, and almost complete destitution; and withall slavery in its worst forms.” was his answer. The destructiveness of Federal forces convinced Edgeworth Bird that “anything is better for us than to submit to Yankee rule. That people are determined upon our ruin and will carry it out if in their power.” Likewise, James Brannock admitted,

It makes my blood almost curdle in my vein when I think of the many dreadful outrages that have been perpetrated upon the far daughters of the South, either by the Yankees themselves, or by the Negroes at their instigation. And this is the people from whom we are to expect kind & merciful treatment after they have subjugated us. Subjugated indeed! Better that every man, woman & child in the South should be buried together in one wide, common grave.”

Charles Fenton James thought surrendering meant having “our property confiscated, our slaves emancipated, our leaders hung, and we become serfs in the land of our fathers, then he (Abraham 1st) might exercise his pardoning power with liberality. We have the alternative of submission or war.” In the end, visions of northern collapse and southern subjugation induced many Confederates to prolong the war in order to obtain the former and avoid the latter.66

Like Confederate religion, soldiers’ perceptions of the foe clarified the struggle and provided meaning for their hardships. The extent that Confederates relied on images
of the Yankees as inept or barbaric shows how important these figures were to the Rebels' worldview. But all abstractions, no matter how valuable, distort reality, and this is a conundrum endemic to warfare. If Rebels viewed their victims and assailants as complete human beings, they risked undermining their ability to perform as soldiers. But to view the foe in an abstract framework—to simplify the other side or half of the war—precluded Confederates from seeing the conflict with greater comprehension. Just as many Rebels twisted theodicy and evangelicalism to convince themselves that God would deliver them victory, Confederates also warped the enemy into caricatures that appeared too weak or too evil to win the war. Either way, the result was a powerful determination to continue fighting an enemy that had become so alien to most Rebels that they could not bear the thought of reunion.


3 Fussel, *Wartime*, 115; Theodore (Shupan?) to Kate Adams, 27 July 1864, Israel L. Adams and Family Papers, LSU.


5 Two caveats are important here. First, slavery was a major difference between North and South, and I do not intend to discount the significant divisions it created between the sections. Instead, I mean to address the process by which Americans came to view each other as irreconcilably opposed despite the many common interests and traits that bond them together as a nation and people. For the impact of slavery on the Old South, see Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery* (New York, 1965); Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974). Second, by focusing on how southerners came to view the North as alien and hostile, I am not blaming southerners for the conflict. Northerners were just as responsible for creating the mask of Cain, and they used it on southerners; however, they are not the topic of my work. For northern abstractions of the South, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970); Susan-Mary Grant, *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence, Ka., 2000).

6 First quotation in Bill Cecil-Fronsman, Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina (Lexington, Ky., 1992), 153. Second and third quotations in Thomas, *The Confederacy As a Revolutionary Experience*, 18. Thomas argues that this mentality was so narrow for some men that “personal and local affairs absorbed his attention to the exclusion of abstractions like New England and Europe—in many cases to the exclusion of abstractions in general.” (p. 18). Perhaps, but intensity of sectional debates in the 1850s encouraged thousands of southerners to construct abstractions of “yankeedom,” because it seemed so distant, unknown, and hostile. Indeed the limited circles of southerners’ lives precluded most of them from even meeting northerners—a condition that prompted abstractions in the first place. Parochialism affected northerners as well. For a discussion of how northern soldiers viewed Confederates and the South,
see Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 90-147. Some of the best analysis of southern frontier life can still be found in the classics: W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), 3-28; Clement Eaton, *A History of the Old South* (New York, 1949). Parallel lines of westward expansion created by northern and southern settlers were signs of the country's polarization. When these lines intersected, as they did in Kansas, the disparate aims of families from opposite regions sparked violence. "Bleeding Kansas" convinced many Americans that the sections were fatally opposed to one another—that their differences were real and not just perceived. Fourth quotation in Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeomen Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, 1995). I suspect the familial authority McCurry finds in the established Low Country was as strong or stronger on the frontier. Joan Cashin has argued as much in *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York, 1991).

7 John Hope Franklin, *A Southern Odyssey*, xv. Franklin equated the trip to "the Grand Tour" of Europe, "some southerners did make the grand tour of Europe, but a much larger number went to the North. In the preparations for the trip and in the reactions, during and after the experience, it seemed a satisfactory substitute for the longer journey." (p. 1) Firebrands like James Hammond and Robert Rhett spoke of countrymen above the Mason-Dixon line from personal experience.


9 Cash dismissed the validity of the thesis on the first page of his first chapter: "Men of position and power, men who are adjusted to their environment, men who find life bearable in their accustomed place—such men do not embark on frail ships for a dismal frontier where savages prowl and slay, and living is a grim laborious ordeal." Yet Cash understood the potency of the myth and decried its persistence in histories that painted the Old South as "the home of a genuine and fully realized aristocracy" in Cash, *Mind of the South*, 4. For an illuminating account of how ethnic divisions, real or imagined, precipitated civil war in Bosnia, see Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor*. Lawrence LeShan sees the development of abstractions for other people or nations as a common indicator of ensuing war in *The Psychology of War: Comprehending Its Mystique and Its Madness* (Chicago, 1992).


the specific debate with Northern abolitionists over the morality of slavery,” (pp. 12-13) and “the North was critical in another way to the growth of Southern religious separatism, by providing a negative reference point by which Southern ministers could assure themselves of their own political and religious orthodoxy” (p. 24).


15 Diverse events and figures in the war supported Rebel’s perception of an inept foe. In addition to Lee and Jackson, Confederate cavalry leaders often provided the most colorful evidence that southern intelligence, courage, and ability surpassed northern numbers. When Nathan Bedford Forrest, John Morgan, John Mosby, and J.E.B. Stuart humiliated Federal opponents, they produced an entire genre of legends that could be titled “The Gallant Escapades of the Confederate Cavalry Kings.” Ralph Semmes, captain of the *Alabama*, mimicked these men’s successes on the high seas against overwhelming odds. In addition to Fort Sumter and Manassas, Jackson’s Valley Campaign and Lee’s defense of Richmond during the Seven Days battles were offered as proof of Rebel military superiority. It is telling that the western theater, where the war was lost for the Confederacy, never produced comparable leaders and victories (except for the cavalymen).


18 At the Crater, Thomas Elder noted, “the negroes fought better than their white Yankee brethren.” Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 30 July 1864, Thomas
Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS. Also see Milton Barrett to his brother and sister, 1 August 1864, in J. Roderick Heller III and Carolynn Ayers Heller, eds., The Confederacy Is on Her Way Up the Spout: Letters to South Carolina, 1861-1864 (Athens and London, 1992), 123; and Edmund Fitzgerald Stone Letter, date unknown, VHS.

19 Mother to Dunbar Affleck, 21 May 1864, Thomas Affleck Correspondence and Writings, LSU; Thomas Key Diary, 10 April 1864, in Cate, ed., Two Soldiers, 70. Key uses the “miscegenator” in his 7 December 1864 entry (p. 164). Daniel, Southern Protestantism in the Confederacy, 39.

20 Gray, The Warriors, 133-34. Some of the factors that affected soldiers’ perceptions of the enemy are so self-evident that we often fail to consider how they influenced the language used to describe the foe and shaped “us against them” dichotomies. The simple term, “the enemy,” is one example. The physical distance between belligerents and the circumstances of their encounters are others that are discussed later in this chapter. In his work on the Balkans, Michael Ignatieff describes how action and belligerency produces these generalizations: “Before the war, he might have thought of himself as a Yugoslav or a café manager or a husband rather than as a Serb. Now as he sits in his farmhouse bunker, there are men two hundred and fifty yards away who would kill him. For them he is only a Serb, not a neighbor, not a friend, not a Yugoslav, not a former teammate at the football club. And because he is only a Serb to his enemies, he has become only a Serb to himself.” See Warrior’s Honor, 38.

21 Kristen M. Smith, ed., The Lines Are Drawn: Political Cartoons of the Civil War (Athens, Ga., 1999), 86.

22 Ibid, 99. Volck also sketched Lincoln as Don Quixote with General Benjamin Butler as Sancho Panza. A deluded Lincoln proudly rides a worn-out horse and a drunk Butler sits an equally worthless mule. A distant windmill marks the folly of their efforts.

23 Ibid., 93.

24 Ibid., 101.

25 Ibid., 103, 76.

26 Quotation in Bayard Taylor, “Camp-Fire Songs” in Charles W. Hubner, ed., War Poets of the South and Confederate Camp-Fire Songs (Atlanta?, ?), iv. Civil War poetry and music gives us examples of how popular culture shaped soldiers’ perspectives, and yet military historians have seldom used them. Alice Fahs’s cultural study of wartime literature points the way. See Fahs, The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865 (Chapel Hill, 2001). For the influences of music and aurality in general on Civil War participants, see Mark M. Smith, Listening to Nineteenth-Century America (Chapel Hill, 2001). For Confederate music, see Willard A. Heaps and Porter W. Heaps, The Singing Sixties: The Spirit of Civil War Days Drawn from the Music of the
Times (Norman, Ok., 1960); Francis A. Lord and Arthur Wise, Bands and Drummer Boys of the Civil War (New York, 1966). For music in battle, see Earl J. Hess, The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat (Lawrence, Ka., 1997), 112. For a comparative look at Japanese war songs, see Dower, War Without Mercy, 213-14.


29 St. George Tucker, “The Southern Cross,” first quotation, 15; second quotation, 16; James Pierpont, “We Conquer or Die,” third quotation, 29; “Georgia,” “Call All! Call All!,” fourth quotation, 30-33; All in Moore, ed., Songs and Ballads.


32 Ibid., all quotations in “Georgia,” “Call All! Call All!,” 31-33.

33 Ibid., all quotations in Frank Ticknor, “The Old Rifleman,” 119-20.

34 Ibid., first quotation 82, second quotation 104, third quotation 78-79.

35 Ibid., 166-69. Perhaps the most remarkable atrocity song was James R. Randall’s, “At Fort Pillow,” in Hubner, ed. War Poets of the South, 105-08, because Randall justifies the Confederates’ slaughter of hundreds of prisoners as retribution for numberless Federal offenses.

36 Regiments of former slaves fought in 1863, but most Confederate soldiers did not oppose them until 1864. Rebels’ savagery towards African Americans in blue can be reconciled with their support for enlisting slaves in their own army, because many Confederate soldiers voiced a greater commitment to independence and victory than to the institution of slavery. For this debate see Robert F. Durden, The Gray and the Black: The Confederate Debate on Emancipation (Baton Rouge, 1972); Philip D. Dillard, “Independence or Slavery: The Confederate Debate Over Arming the Slaves” (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 1999).
37 John Walters diary, 27 May 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 120; Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 30 May 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., Letters from Lee’s Army, 249; Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 10 June 1864, in ibid., 254; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 19 May 1864, VHS; Thomas Claybrook Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 11 September 1864, Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS. These reductions were also popular in the press (so the soldiers were not solely responsible for this habit), but the soldiers’ abstractions had the greater authority of experience—the soldiers had “fought” Grant or Sherman.

38 Philip Collins to Uncle William Pierson, 5 June 1864, in Cutrer and Parrish, eds., Brothers in Gray, 239; Fred Fleet to Ma, 11 October 1864, Fleet, Betsy and John D. P. Fuller, eds. Green Mount: A Virginia Plantation Family during the Civil War: Being the Journal of Benjamin Robert Fleet and Letters of His Family (Lexington, 1962), 343; James Adams to parents, Sep. 16, 1864, Israel L. Adams and Family Papers, LSU. A lengthy entry in John Walters’ diary shows the combined influence of rumors, perceptions of the enemy, encounters with prisoners (discussed later in this chapter) and caricatures of generals: “Twenty or thirty prisoners were brought in, some of whom report that Grant has taken sick and gone to Washington, leaving Meade in command. No dependence is placed on this report, but if it is so, I shall begin to think that he has been greatly overrated, and has not the moral courage to do what a really great mind should do under the circumstances, which is that when at last becoming convinced that but one more chance was left him, to put himself at the head of his column, and in a desperate effort to regain his laurels, pluck victory from Lee’s grasp or be mourned by the North as one who whatever his mistakes did nobly at the head of is column; but pshaw, I am writing as if the wretch was possessed of chivalric feelings.” In Walters diary, 27 May 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 120-21.

39 First quotation in Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 1 August 1864, Paul M. Higginbotham Papers, VHS; second quotation in James Madison Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 10 April 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; third quotation in James Bates to Ma, 4 May 1864, in Richard Lowe, ed., A Texas Cavalry Officer’s Civil War: The Diary and Letters of James C. Bates (Baton Rouge, 1999), 290-91; fourth quotation in William Casey to Ma, 28 June 1864, William Thomas Casey Papers, VHS; fifth quotation in Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, 1 June 1864, Rozier, ed., Granite Farm Letters, 169.

40 Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, 1 June 1864, in Rozier, ed., Granite Farm Letters, 169. At the time of Bird’s rosy assessment, Grant’s force had lost almost as many men in the previous month as Lee commanded, and yet the Federals still greatly outnumbered the Rebel force. For complete analysis of Confederate miscalculations of opposing numbers, see Chapter 4. For Confederates’ unwavering confidence in Lee, see Gary W. Gallagher, The Confederate War (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

41 Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 30 May 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., Letters from Lee’s Army, 249 (emphasis added); For how the religious
military press damned Grant and Sherman, see Silver, _Church Propaganda and Confederate Morale_, 91. For more on soldiers’ criticism of Grant and Sheridan, see Power, _Lee’s Miserables_, 23-24, 76-77, 143.

42 First quotation in Creed Davis diary, 6 Oct 1864, Creed Thomas Davis Diary, VHS; Power, _Lee’s Miserables_, 142-43; second, third, fourth quotations in William Heartsill diary, 31 July 1864, in Bell I. Wiley, ed., _Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army_ (Jackson, Tenn., 1954), 211; fifth quotation in Heartsill diary, 11 August 1864, _ibid._, 212.

43 First quotation in Edgeworth Bird to Saida Bird, 30 November 1864, in Rozier, ed., _The Granite Farm Letters_, 218; second quotation in Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 21 June 1864, in Blomquist and Taylor, eds., _This Cruel War_, 262. Taylor’s apprehension for the region was heightened by destruction he saw that corroborated with the stories from Dalton. Third quotation in Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 18 June 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., _Letters from Lee’s Army_, 257; fourth quotation in Richard Launcelot Maury Diary, 27 Mar 1865, VHS; fifth quotation in Reuben Pierson to William Pierson, ca. 30 January 1864, in Cutrer and Parrish, eds., _Brothers in Gray_, 226-27. How the complex world of Confederate rumors and news affected soldiers is treated in Chapter 5.

44 First and second quotations in Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 1 July 1864, Paul Higginbotham Papers, VHS; third and fourth quotations in Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 11 July 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., _Letters From Lee’s Army_, 266; fifth and sixth quotations in John Walters Diary, 8 July 1864, in Wiley, ed., _Norfolk Blues_, 132. Also see Power, _Lee’s Miserables_, 117; Spencer Glasgow Welch to Cordelia Strother Welch, 6 July 1864, in Spencer Glasgow Welch, _A Confederate Surgeon’s Letters to His Wife_ (Marietta, Ga., 1954) [originally published in New York and Washington, 1911], p. 102. Sherman’s treatment of Atlanta produced a greater uproar. See, James Madison Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 12 September 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; James Adams to parents, 16 September 1864, Israel L. Adams and Family Papers, LSU; Thomas Key Diary, 4 August 1864, in Cate, ed., _Two Soldiers_, 108.

45 Silver, _Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda_, 85-86; Mitchell, _Civil War Soldiers_, 25-28. It is interesting to note that both Americans and Japanese accused the other side of similar atrocities in the Pacific War, see Dower, _War Without Mercy_, 115-29, Wiley, _Life of Johnny Reb_, 311. See also _Official Records_ Series 1, XII, part 2, 202-203; XX, part 1, 880; and L, part 2, 329; Thomas Key Diary, 30 April 1864, in Cate, ed., _Two Soldiers_, 77-78.

46 Daniel, _Southern Protestantism in the Confederacy_, 40; John Cotton to wife, ca. November 1864, in Lucille Griffith, ed., _Yours Till Death: Civil War Letters of John W. Cotton_ (Birmingham, 1951), 120; Silver, _Church Propaganda and Confederate Morale_, 87. Silver asserted, “the triple-edged combination of horrors at the North, atrocities of
Northerners in the South, and the threat of overwhelming barbarism if the Confederacy failed, moved into high gear in the last two years of the war. Stories of desecrated churches, desolate homes, and outraged women became common.” Malinda Taylor to Grant Taylor, 2 September 1864, in Blomquist and Taylor, eds., This Cruel War, 280; Thomas J. Key diary, 23 September, 1864, in Cate, ed., Two Soldiers, 138-39.

47 Ignatieff, Warrior’s Honor, 176. John Dower has illuminated a similar relationship between atrocity myths and perceptions of the enemy in the Pacific War: “atrocities and war crimes played a major role in the propagation of racial and cultural stereotypes. The stereotypes preceded the atrocities, however, and had an independent existence apart from any specific event.” See Dower, War Without Mercy, 73.

48 First quotation in Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 1 July 1864, Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS; second quotation in John Walters diary, 9 July 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 133; third quotation in John Walters diary, 4 August 1864, ibid., 141; fourth quotation in Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, 4 August 1864, in Rozier, ed., Granite Farm Letters, 180-81.

49 First quotation in Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, 28 August 1864, second quotation in Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, 4 August 1864, both in Rozier, ed., Granite Farm Letters, 196, 181; John Doyle to Maggie Knighton, 26 August 1864, Josiah Knighton and Family Papers, LSU; Charlie DeNoon to his parents, 8 July 1864, in Richard T. Couture, ed., Charlie’s Letters: The Correspondence of Charles E. DeNoon (No place given, 1982), 226.


51 First quotation in Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, 28 August 1864, in Rozier, ed., Granite Farm Letters, 191; second quotation in Edmund Fitzgerald Stone to Samuel Marion Stone, no date, Edmund Fitzgerald Stone Letter, VHS; third quotation in James Madison Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 29 March 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers VHS.

52 Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 1 August 1864, Paul Higginbotham Letters, VHS; John Walters diary, 1 August 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 140. For more Confederate accounts of the Crater, see Power, Lee’s Miserables, 135-40. It’s worth noting that some Confederates were sickened by the massacres. Larry Logue has argued that Confederates persisted because they thought the “Yankees promised to take away their property and their right to lead, and to make blacks equal with whites—a society not worth living in.” See Logue, To Appomattox and Beyond, 80-81.

54 First quotation in John Walters diary, 2 August 1864, Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 141; second quotation in Fred Fleet to Ma, 19 August 1864, in Fleet and Fuller, eds., *Green Mount*, 333; third quotation in Gray, *The Warriors*, 138-39. For other accounts of fatigue in the trenches, see William Casey to “Cousin,” 20 July 1864, and Casey to “Jimmie” Casey, 30 June 1864, both in William Thomas Casey Papers, VHS. It’s worth noting that the proximity of trench warfare caused both a standardization of hostility and regressions into tit-for-tat retaliation. Preservation of life and logic could trump aggression and hatred if both sides agreed to follow certain rules, such as curbing sharpshooters, allowing the retrieval of wounded, and giving pickets a safe passage at the start and finish of their shifts. Violations of these “rules” escalated hostilities. When Edmund Stone and his fellow skirmishers broke a truce and killed a number of unsuspecting black pickets, the Federals retaliated with an artillery barrage that night. See Edmund Fitzgerald Stone Letter, date unknown, (he was stationed between the Appomattox and James Rivers at the time), VHS. For this balance between regulation and retaliation in trench warfare, see Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat & Identity in World War I* (London, New York, and Melbourne, 1979), 108-09. For a detailed examination of life in the trenches around Petersburg, see Power, *Lee’s Miserables*, 109-40; for a chilling account of trench warfare between Sherman and Johnston’s armies, see Royster’s description of the battle of Kennesaw Mountain in *Destructive War*, 296-320.

55 First and second quotations in Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory*, 77, 75 respectively. The dichotomies of war separate a soldier not only from the enemy but also from civilians, officers, and even his prewar self. For more on these polarities, see Gerald Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York, 1987), and Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Linderman cautions scholars who compare trench warfare in the Civil War and World War One: “Those were harsh lives indeed, harsher on the Confederate side than on the Union side, but, it should be recorded, seldom touching on either side that order of severity that would come to characterize conditions on the Western front during World War I. Even in the final stages of the Civil War the boundaries of military discipline, however expanded beyond those of 1861, could not always confine soldier attempts to fashion their own relief. Neither discipline nor the enlargement of combat could, for example completely stifle local truces.” (p. 154) The trench warfare of the Great War was greater in magnitude and longevity than the siege of Petersburg and Richmond; however, both events shared the conditions I’ve stressed in this section: stark polarity, monotony, tactical deadlock, desensitization, and filth.

For similar impressions of the enemy dead, see Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 123, 140, and Welch, *Confederate Surgeon's Letters*, 94-95, 98. Paul Fussell also considers the impact that dead foeman have on soldiers' perceptions in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 77. Hiram Williams, an engineer in the Army of Tennessee, expressed empathy for the fallen foe on a number of occasions: "Poor fellows! I would pity the untimely death of the bitterest foe I have on Earth," in Lewis N. Wynne and Robert A. Taylor, eds., *This War So Horrible: The Civil War Diary of Hiram Smith Williams* (Tuscaloosa, Ala. and London, 1993), 32-33, 68 quotation, p. 32. In contrast, when Edwin Fay helped bury enemy bodies, he "printed Abolitionist on a Oak Board and stuck it at his head for the Yanks to see if they should come after we left." Wiley, ed., "This Infernal War," 180.

57 Richard Launcelot Maury Diary, 28 March 1865, VHS. I've added the emphasis to Maury's text, because what word better than "specimen" expresses that Rebels observed captives as representative samples of the enemy? Creed Davis used the same word when describing prisoners in June 1864: "Some prisoners captured to day. Good specimens of the New England Yankees," in Creed Thomas Davis Diary, 4 June 1864, VHS. For Heartsill’s reckonings of arriving prisoners, see Bell I. Wiley, ed., *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army* (Jackson, Tenn., 1954), 199-206. Some writers of twentieth-century warfare have stressed how encounters with prisoners often bridged the psychological distances belligerents created. As J. Glenn Gray put it, "one opportunity the front-line soldier has to know the enemy as a human being is when he takes prisoners, and this is frequently a crucial experience for soldiers. The prisoner of war reveals to his opponent that he, too, cherished life and that he has at least a minimal trust in your humanity, otherwise he would not be surrendering. The soldier who has taken, or himself been made, a prisoner of war will inevitably be a changed man and fighter. His foe has been demonstrated to be comprehensible and of the same stuff, at least outwardly, as he himself is made of." See Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York, 1959), 137. John Dower has also contended that Japanese prisoners in the Pacific War revealed a level of humanity and cooperation that did not exist in American stereotypes of the enemy. See Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 60-71.

58 First quotation in Creed Thomas Davis Diary, 18 May 1864, VHS; second quotation in John Cotton to his wife, 9 June 1864, in Griffith, ed., *Yours Till Death*, 112; third quotation in Reuben Pierson to David Pierson, 22 May 1864, in Cutrer and Parrish, eds., *Brothers in Gray*, 237. For other accounts of Union deserters, see John Walters Diary, 10 October 1864, and 30 October 1864, in Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 162-63, 170; Power, *Lee's Miserables*, 77.

59 Wiley, *Life of Johnny Reb*, 314; George Binford to Cousin Bob, 3 June 1864, George C. Binford Letters, VHS; John Walters Diary, 3 June 1864, in Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 122; Power, *Lee's Miserables*, 77-78. There were plenty of instances when Confederates complimented the enemy's valor or resolve. For examples, see Giles Buckner Cooke Diary, 1 April 1865, Giles Buckner Cooke Diary, 1864-1865, VHS; Cutrer and Parrish, eds., *Brothers in Gray*, 239; Cash and Howorth, eds., *My Dear Nellie*, 209-10.
Sometimes Rebels’ twisted their perceptions of the foe so much that their conclusions about the enemy would be comical if they were not so costly to both sides. During Spottsylvania Court House, Charles Blackford was convinced that Grant ordered his troops to certain death, in part, because they were immigrants. To support his opinion, Blackford contended that most of the enemy wounded and dead could not speak English. See Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 19 May 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., Letters from Lee’s Army, 246.

This is a subject that deserves greater attention. I’ve abbreviated my treatment of it here to keep the chapter a reasonable size. For soldiers’ psychological distance from opponents, see S. L. A. Marshall, Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War (New York, 1947); Gray, The Warriors; Ben Shalit, The Psychology of Conflict and Combat (New York, 1988); and Dave Grossman, On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society (Boston, 1995). Psychological distance is not the only element that separates soldiers from guilt. Group absolution, instinctual action acquired through drilling and experience, the chain of command, “combat high,” and the mechanical and physical distance between a soldier and his target also diminish individual responsibility.

Ignatieff, Warrior’s Honor, 51.

Reuben Pierson to William Pierson, 19 April 1864 Cutrer and Parrish, eds. Brothers in Gray, 233; William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 5 May 1864, in Cash, ed., My Dear Nellie, 175; Thomas Key Diary, 1 May 1864, in Cate, ed., Two Soldiers, 78. Also see Hugh W. Montgomery to A. W. Hyatt, 25 May 1864, Arthur W. Hyatt Papers, LSU. Montgomery admitted that northern financial trouble “opens a new theater of hope to a struggling people.” Being that all these accounts were written within weeks of each other, it’s likely they were either responses to rumor or news from the North or wishful thinking that provided an alternative route to victory than the soon-to-commence spring campaigns.

John Walters Diary, 7 November 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 172; William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 5 May 1864, in Cash, ed., My Dear Nellie, 175; Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 10 June 1864, Paul Higginbotham Papers, VHS. Visions of northern financial ruin also appeared in southern sermons. See Stephen Elliott, Gideon's Water-Lappers. . . . [4143] (Macon, 1864), 9.


Parents to Fred Fleet, 12 June 1864, in Fleet and Fuller, eds., Green Mount, 332; Silver, Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda, 82-84, 90-91; William L. Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 5 May 1864, in Cash, ed., My Dear Nellie, 174; Edgeworth Bird to Wilson Bird, 17 January 1865, in Rozier, ed., The Granite Farm Letters, 236-37; James Madison Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, Mar 29, 1864, James
Madison Brannock Papers, VHS. Brannock had a similar reaction after the fall of Atlanta, see Brannock to Brannock, 12 September 1864, Brannock Papers, VHS. Charles Fenton James to Emma A. James, 7 February 1865, Charles Fenton James Letters, VHS.
Chapter Four

The Fog of Battle: Confederates and the Immediate War

"I doubt if any soldiers in the world ever needed so much cumulative evidence to convince them that they were beaten." Union General John M. Schofield, Forty-Six Years in the Army.¹

"The Confederate army outlived the purpose for which it had been created." Charles Royster, The Destructive War.²

Military Spirit and Misjudgments

According to Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz, the “true military spirit” that separates veteran armies from other legions springs from two sources: frequent exertions to the limits of human endurance and memories of victory. Clausewitz argued that, "nothing else will show a soldier the full extent of his capacities." Like a strong tree that cannot be easily killed, armies endowed with this spirit “survive the wildest storms of misfortune and defeat.” The Confederacy withstood the “wildest storms” of 1864 in part because its two veteran armies, the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of Tennessee, imbued this military spirit with a conviction they were unconquerable. While an enemy force twice its size pushed and pummeled the first army to the gates of Richmond, its veterans maintained an aura of invincibility around themselves and their general, Robert E. Lee. Likewise, while an enemy host twice its size maneuvered the second army to the outskirts of Atlanta, its troops believed in themselves and their general, Joe Johnston. During these contests, the sources of military spirit continued to replenish the Rebel armies: men suffered unprecedented hardships that steelèd their resolve, and veterans not only remembered past triumphs but interpreted present engagements in a positive light.³

But how did this “true military spirit,” or culture of invincibility, survive in an environment replete with adversity, deprivation, death, and failure? Abstractions such as
the belief in providential aid or perceptions of the enemy persisted through the toil and turmoil of 1864–1865, because those convictions were impervious to the hardships of the concrete world. To understand how Rebels interpreted daily suffering, setbacks, and carnage in an optimistic manner requires greater explanation. Clausewitz’s formula for a veteran army offers part of the answer. Endurance and past glories inspired thousands of Confederates to continue the war. Historians who stress comradeship and ideology further illuminate Rebel motivation. As a veteran of the Second World War expressed it, “it took me darn near a whole war to figure out what I was fighting for. It was the other guys. Your outfit, the guys in your company, but especially your platoon. . . . When there might be 15 left out of 30 or more, you got an awfully strong feeling about those 15 guys.” Casualties strengthened the bonds between Rebel survivors as well. A third, murkier factor affecting morale involved how Rebels perceived their immediate world. Throughout the war’s final campaigns many Confederates grossly misjudged the odds they faced and the outcomes of the battles they fought. This chapter attempts to recapture Rebels’ clouded but strangely confident view of their surroundings and circumstances.4

The first section explores how Confederates withstood the physical punishments and privations of 1864. Poor supplies, anxiety for home, fatigue, attrition, destruction, and war weariness—elements that convinced some men to desert—emboldened others to further resistance. In other words, diehards were not oblivious to their surroundings; they understood their conditions and circumstances as well as those who quit. Yet the trials that broke the will of some soldiers strengthened the spirit of others. Fortitude emanated from a number of sources. Being young men, most Confederates sought to convince themselves and others of their masculinity, and enduring severe hardships without complaining or quitting signified manhood. Comradeship enforced these gender norms. Camaraderie provided friendship, but it also pressured veterans to withstand unending squalor before the eyes of peers who mattered most.
But Clausewitz argued that victories were as important to military spirit as endurance and activity. How did Confederate armies retain their cohesiveness during the successive defeats of 1864? The answer lies within soldiers’ perceptions, rather than historians’ accounts, of the 1864 campaigns. Scholars often present a bird’s eye view of military operations. Battle maps that follow campaigns from the crow’s vantage point epitomize this perspective. Using historical hindsight, maps summarize the complex designs and actions of armies in a dispassionate and accurate manner. Arrows, lines, and other symbols represent the experiences of thousands of men in a way that connects everything to a sweeping, coherent narrative. The soldiers who fought these campaigns (and their officers too) lacked this complete picture and instead saw warfare from a worm’s eye view. Battles and other events seemed too close, too incomplete, and too dark for participants to discern much beyond their immediate surroundings. This uncertainty gave optimists room to dream—each new battle could be the one that decides the war, and any minor tactical gain could be imagined to lead to greater developments. From the bird’s eye view, the Confederacy seems doomed in 1864. From the worm’s eye view, the Rebellion appeared closer to victory that year than ever before.⁵

The second section of this chapter attempts to explain the dissonance between these views by interweaving both perspectives in a narrative of the campaigns for Richmond and Atlanta. After an overview of each engagement (the bird’s eye view), the soldiers express how the battle looked to them (the worm’s eye view). As this interwoven account takes shape, certain patterns emerge. For a number of reasons, soldiers claimed victories in battles that historians consider stalemates or Confederate defeats. Rebels tended to underestimate their own losses and exaggerate enemy casualties. They did so in part because Federal armies often suffered greater casualties and frequently left their dead and wounded in southern hands. Confederates also followed strict definitions of a tactical victory. Whenever they retained control of the field or thwarted the enemy’s intentions, Confederates declared themselves winners. But by focusing on the current situation,
many Rebels missed the greater implications of a series of engagements. For example, General Joe Johnston’s men claimed victories whenever they repulsed Sherman’s assaults, but many Rebels failed to comprehend how their overall retreat toward Atlanta eclipsed such minor successes.

Two beliefs reinforced soldiers’ optimistic perceptions. First, Rebels maintained an unquestioning faith in most of their commanders. Even when they suffered severe hardships or high casualties, the troops seldom challenged Lee or Johnston’s decisions. This obedience muted criticism of how the campaigns were directed and freed the troops from answering how success would be achieved. Even men who admitted that they saw no path to independence trusted their commanders to find a way. Second, most Confederates thought that one, great victory—a Confederate Cannae—could decide the war in their favor. Despite three years of oscillating fortunes and stalemated campaigns—after the mammoth carnage of Shiloh, Antietam, Gettysburg, and Chickamauga buried thousands but failed to destroy either army—many veterans still believed that a brilliant, tactical success would decide the struggle. The dramatic, unprecedented scale of the 1864 contests amplified soldiers’ conviction that this decisive battle was imminent. As the war worsened, accelerated, and pushed Confederates to the limits of their endurance, the troops anticipated this all-or-nothing showdown, both because momentum seemed to be leading towards it and because they wanted peace more than ever. However inaccurate or naive these perceptions seem from today’s perspective, they sustained Rebels’ hope through the worst military scenarios and long past the point where victory seems possible in hindsight.6
Withstanding Privation and Portents of Defeat

For many reasons scholars have better explained the conduct of Confederate soldiers who deserted in 1864–1865 than they have deciphered the behavior of those who fought to the bitter end. Our understanding of the dire conditions that surrounded Rebels—the widespread destruction, overwhelming odds, and harsh living—combines with our knowledge of the war’s outcome to render desertion a more rational act to us than persistence. Accounts by Confederates who remained to the bitter end illuminate how differently the war looked from a combatant’s vantage point. Though these Rebels saw bad portents, they also found good omens that colored their immediate war.7

Nevertheless, deficient supplies told even the most stalwart fighters that the Confederacy was in trouble. Ironically, a land so abundant with agriculture and devoid of industry primarily lacked food and forage, not ammunition and guns. While encroaching Federal armies wasted fields and closed off occupied regions from Confederate commissary agents, Rebel manufacturing, particularly Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, remained safe from Union hands. Powder, shells, and rifles also withstood the Confederacy’s long and unreliable transportation routes better than perishable meat, grain, and vegetables did. By 1864 government agents relied on a shrinking area of farmland for provisions and sometimes claimed a farmer’s entire surplus in exchange for increasingly worthless Confederate dollars.

Soldiers felt this penury when the army reduced their rations in 1864. From 1861 to 1863 soldiers received three-quarters of a pound pork or bacon or one and a half pounds of fresh or salt beef per day. The new regulations cut their standard to one-half pound of pork or bacon for campaigning troops and one-third pound for stationary units. Creed Thomas Davis said every soldier knew such rations were “barely sufficient to sustain life.” Charles Blackford concurred, “I merely eat to live, and live on as little as possible.” He described his fare as “corn-bread and poor beef,—blue and tough,—no vegetables, no coffee, sugar tea or even molasses. . . . You would laugh, or cry, when you
see me eating my supper,—a pone of corn-bread and a tin cup of water. We have meat only once a day.” Blackford told his wife, “it is hard to maintain one’s patriotism on ashcake and water.” Edgeworth Bird was sick of “beef so lean that it does not cast a shadow.” “That’s my diet now,” he complained, “a steak of lean and a streak of fat.” Lafayette Orr was “nearly starved out on corn bread” and considered conditions not only “mighty hard and dissatisfyin,” but “myty gloomy at the present time.” Nevertheless, Orr “never dispaired yet and never doubted our suckees.” Despite their grumbling, Davis, Blackford, Bird, Orr, and thousands just like them, stuck it out to the end of the war.

Many soldiers supplemented their diet and sustained their spirits by foraging together or sharing food they received from home. “Foraging,” or getting food without paying for it, included everything from hunting and fishing to outright theft. In September 1864 a surgeon observed “the soldiers . . . robbing the people of peas, potatoes, pumpkins and everything they can carry away.” He excused their behavior, because “the citizens on the other hand will not sell for Confederate Money.” While defending the trenches around Petersburg in the winter of 1864–1865, Creed Davis worked for local civilians in exchange for food. When Davis received no rations at all he “shucked some corn for a farmer in the neighborhood, for which he promises to pay flour.” “What an idea,” he remarked, “men serving in the Army and having to work for their bread at the same time.” Later that month Davis “cut two cords of wood for a lady in return for a bushel of potatoes and a bushel of turnips.” Though privations induced thousands to desert, dire circumstances also united fellow sufferers and raised the pride of men who withstood adversities. Davis pratted, “we are independent of the Government for rations.” Likewise, Rueben Pierson boasted to his father, “I have never known a heartier or hardier set of men in my experience than the members of Co. ‘C’ . . . . They live on 1/4 lb. of bacon and one pound of flour and never murmer.”

Inadequate supplies of clothing provoked the same mixture of dissatisfaction and stalwart pride. During the winter 1864–1865 Creed Davis sarcastically wrote, “the
government yesterday opened its heart and gave me a blanket.” Lacking shoes or rations, Davis felt “nevertheless required to do [his] duty.” Such talk could be interpreted two ways: either authorities and the threat of punishment compelled a man to fulfill his tasks, or he pushed himself to continue in order to receive the respect and admiration of his equally sacrificial comrades. In the final stage of the war, comradeship was both a positive force that inspired friendship and selflessness and peer pressure that favored superhuman endurance and pushed men to their limits. Frank Adams exemplified the latter impulse in early 1865 when he claimed, “I can stay in the army as long as any body.” In the end, both external demands and internalized values kept troops like Davis and Adams in the trenches. Charles Blackford witnessed the affects of this mentality on Hood’s Brigade in January 1864:

They have been campaigning out here on frozen ground, many of them with bare feet, leaving bloody footsteps on the snow and ice. Try to get the ladies in their knitting club to do something for them. Shoes are very scarce. The men get pieces of raw hide from the butchers, and, after wrapping their feet up in old rags, sew the hide around them, making a clumsy ball, which they wear without yanking off until it wears out. . . . it was most pitiful to see the poor fellows struggling along . . . yet there was not a murmur. Their progress, however, was slow; but when ordered into a line of battle they were quick as if shod with the best and as if there was no snow, ice and briars to make their cold feet bleed.

The warrior’s code glorified troops who weathered combat and wretchedness in silence. Facing the war’s interminable length, Frank Adams concluded, “there is no use crying it cant bee helped.” Quiet endurance, or as the soldiers put it, suffering “without a murmur,” affirmed Confederate soldiers’ masculinity and veteran status. James Brannock marveled, “the world has never produced such soldiers.” “Boys, delicately raised & cared for tenderly at home, are marching day & night, though cold & wet, over mountains & rocks, hungry, fatigued & barefooted & that too . . . without a single murmur.” Charles
Andry wrote his mother from the defenses of Mobile, “tell father that if I ever come out of this revolution safe, he may flatter himself of having a son who though raised in the lap of luxury, has passed through the most infernal ordeal of privations, of hardships, of abergation [sic.] & of misery without a murmur.” Andry’s perseverance even confirmed his ability to take his father’s position as the family patriarch: “I shall make it a true pleasure to assist him, in his old age, in any capacity which my limited qualifications will allow me.” Soldiering was a maturation process for thousands of southern men, and doing one’s part in battle and on the march without complaining was considered a sign of manhood.10

One of the severest trials for Confederate soldiers, particularly in the war’s final period, was the uncertainty of conditions at home. Many men withstood personal privations better than they abided thoughts of their families suffering. Wild rumors and sensational newspaper reports supported paranoid visions of devastation and starvation. Moreover, conflicting intelligence could mock troops’ limited breadth of information and leave them wondering if the enemy had destroyed or bypassed their homes. After hearing how the enemy plundered his county, Fred Fleet wrote home, “I hope the reports are exaggerated, but I am almost afraid to hear the true account.” Edwin Leet admitted to his wife, “I have been very uneasy since the Yankeys were at Woodville, I heard that they had been through your neighborhood and destroyed everything[,] but Capt Mumford tells me they have not been there.” Paul Higginbotham told his brother he had not heard from home for nearly a month, “so you may know how anxious I am to hear from the folks. After hearing the raiders had gotten into Amherst, I was almost crazy to learn what damage was done, and as is always the case, we heard a thousand different reports. Today’s paper says that they treated Ladies near McIvers Depot too bad to write here.” From the Petersburg trenches, William Casey waited to hear how his family managed against General Philip Sheridan’s columns. He wrote, “Ma: I am almost afraid to hear from you all. I am afraid that old Sheridan took every thing that you all had left.” Seasoned
Confederates learned that anxiety and misinformation could combine to shake the firmest morale.¹¹

Historians have long noted how these circumstances encouraged men to desert for their family's sake, but thousands of Rebels withstood such temptations, and some men seemed to lack the urge altogether. While a host of factors, including military authority, ideology, comradeship, and the unconquerable mentality, kept men in the ranks, particular elements helped them to cope with threats to their loved ones. Some of these determinants appeared in previous chapters. As Christians, many Rebels endured such anxieties by relying on divine favor and protection for their families. As partisans, Confederates used Federal menaces of the home front to confirm their low opinion of the foe and inspire renewed resistance. As veteran troops, many of these men also considered civilian hardships an unfortunate but unavoidable element of warfare. Instead of deserting to rescue parents, spouses, and children, many soldiers offered loved ones objective advice on how to face northern destroyers. Charles Blackford admitted to his wife, "to think that my whole family, wife, child, mother, sister, are probably this very morning subjected to the insults and indignities of a band of freebooters makes my blood boil." Nevertheless Blackford sent his wife dispassionate instructions:

Should the yankees come you must stand your ground, hiding all your supplies and valuables, or send them away, if you know where to send them. You might have your pieces of bacon hid away in various parts of the house. Peggy should pack some away in her mattress as the yankees will, I suppose, respect her race, or at least not suspect the hiding place. The household must exert its ingenuity to devise safe hiding places for your things. It will perhaps, be better to lend your bacon and flour to the commissary department, returnable in kind, if you find the yankees about to occupy the place. It can furnish transportation very easily.

Likewise, Paul Higginbotham "was glad to learn the Yankees did not get to Fathers . . . . But they will no doubt try another [raid] before long." He counseled his brother, "you
must tell them at home, how to do at home in case the Yankees should come again. Tell them to run off the horses, and every thing else that they would be likely to carry off.” When James Brannock noticed in the papers and “heard through various private sources” that Federal columns had sacked his home town, he told his wife, “the thought haunts me day & night that my wife & children may be without a home to shelter them.” Yet he comforted himself with the thought “that they have true & tried friends who will never permit them to want for food & shelter.” Men like Blackford, Higginbotham, and Brannock had plenty of reasons to flee to their loved ones, but instead they faced the trials of war with pragmatic clarity—fulfilling their duty seemed the surer route to ending the interminable struggle.12

Rebels had more to fear than the impact of total war on their homes and supplies though, because Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan brought the same relentless pressure to the battlefield. The continuous campaigns of 1864–1865 caused unparalleled suffering for troops on both sides. Gone were the years of confined engagements and short battles nestled within long periods of inactivity and recuperation. Now the great armies traveled within each other’s shadow and clashed almost daily. While Grant’s Army of the Potomac pushed Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia toward Richmond and Petersburg, Sherman’s combined western armies maneuvered General Joe Johnston’s Army of Tennessee towards Atlanta. As Earl Hess has explained, the war’s final phase packed “several battles with the intensity of Gettysburg and Chickamauga into a compressed time span, each one linked by only a few hours or days of maneuvering into positions while under the guns of an alert and desperate enemy. The war would shift into overdrive, and the pressures placed on the common soldier would dramatically intensify.” Grant expressed the grim tenacity of this struggle in a dispatch he sent to Washington after fires had cremated his wounded in the Wilderness: “I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer.” It took all summer, fall, winter, and part of the following spring.13
The men who served in these campaigns fought, marched, entrenched, and guarded by day and night for months. Fatigue and filth dogged their tracks. Nine miles from Richmond on 28 May 1864, Charles DeNoon told his parents, “I am tolerably well, considering the fatigue I have undergone for the last 24 days hard fighting and marching. Our Regt. fought the Yankees for 11 hours on the 25th. It was one continuous roar of musketry.” A few days later Creed Davis scribbled in his diary that he had slept three of the last forty-eight hours. Writing his wife from the battle line, Captain Samuel McKittrick explained, “we have been ever since the 7th of May marching around or lying in line of battle all the time. We have marched, I suppose about 150 miles by day and night. We moved a short distance yesterday and struck up camp in the rain. . . . My dear; it is a hard struggle for independence.” Six weeks into the campaign, Paul Higginbotham was “nearly broken with fatigue and want of rest.” The strain of being “exposed to Shelling and Pickett firing nearly all the time” was taking its toll. He and the men were “dirty as Hogs, and full of Buggers,” because they had no chance to clean themselves. Though he carried a fresh shirt in his knapsack, the Virginian could not “afford to put it on yet,” because the campaign’s conclusion was beyond sight. These conditions produced an irritability that coursed through Higginbotham’s letters. He complained about the flies, the heat, rotten apples, bad water, “the sound of cannon and musketry,” and the war in general. Higginbotham’s correspondence illustrates that suffering “without a murmur” was sometimes a metaphor for selfless endurance rather than reality. Most soldiers complained of the strain and pined for peace at some point, but they also upheld the ideal of sacrificial service and stayed in the ranks through their darkest hours.14

Men of every rank wore the affects of unremitting warfare on their faces and frames. Gaunt and ashen, many Rebels seemed to age years, and some men never regained their youthful health and countenances. Constant toil put Thomas Hampton in the hospital with diarrhea. He wrote his wife, “you do not know how much exposure & hardships we have gone threw since [the campaign began six weeks ago] & not much
prospect of things getting any better soon.” From May to August, Hampton’s weight dropped from 162 to 137 pounds. When Hiram Williams went home on leave, friends did not recognize him until he spoke. On 7 July General Lawrence “Sull” Ross wrote his wife, “I am nearly worn out, and was surprised upon looking in a glass at my care worn and haggard Expression. It seems to me I look ten years older than when you saw me last. I have rested only one day since my last letter to you, [April 26] been fighting all the time.” Generals A. P. Hill and Richard Ewell broke down from exhaustion. Hill suffered from mysterious, possibly psychosomatic, maladies. Ewell, who lost a leg earlier in the war, never resumed command. Even Lee fell sick during the campaign. In Georgia, General John Bell Hood, with a crippled left arm and without a right leg, fought on though he had to be tied to the saddle. The youngest Confederate to command an army, Hood changed from one of the most striking and vigorous figures of the war to a haunting and sallow specter—a living metaphor for the crippled Rebellion.15

While hunger and fatigue emaciated individuals, attrition decimated the ranks. Though Lee and Johnston tried to conserve manpower and inflict the maximum casualties on their assailants by maintaining strong defensive positions, even headlong, murderous charges by the Federals killed irreplaceable Rebels. From May to September, General Ross’s brigade shrunk from 1,000 to scarcely more than 200 men as the troops fought eighty-seven engagements in one hundred days. After Atlanta fell, the 9th Texas Cavalry counted 110 active members out of the original 1,000 who started the campaign. Its brigade contained only 686 of the roughly 4,000 horse soldiers who originally composed the outfit. Whether Confederates admitted it or not, the Federals’ persistent pounding was shrinking Rebel units beyond recognition.16

Veterans recognized attrition, and some felt it stalked them. In February 1864, Hiram Williams returned to his unit after a sixteen-month absence. “What a change from the company in which I first volunteered two years ago,” Williams lamented, noting that “three of my old mess are dead, [and] several are wounded or disabled for life.” He
catalogued the losses: “Aughe has lost a leg and has gone. Springsteed is gone. Bradley is wounded, a dozen or more are prisoners at the North, while many of them are dead. There graves are scattered from Dog River all through Mississippi, at Columbus, Deer Creek, and Vicksburg, to this place.” “Such is war,” he concluded. On May 7, 1864, Surgeon Spencer Welch walked past the dead and dying of the Wilderness: “as usual on such occasions groans and cries met me from every side. I found Colonel James Nance, my old schoolmate, and Colonel Gaillard of Fairfield lying side by side in death. Near them lay Warren Peterson, with a shattered thigh-bone, and still others who were my friends.” In June, Grant Taylor’s brother-in-law and messmate, Ide, fell into Federal hands while on picket duty. “I feel very lonely to-day for they never make any better men than Ide. And a brother has he been to me and I feel that I have lost a true friend.” Taylor’s company numbered only thirteen.  

On June 3, 1864, Henry Berkeley’s artillery unit lost fourteen men at Cold Harbor. The day started as most others did, with Berkeley and his close friend, Edmund Anderson, sharing breakfast. The sounds of combat separated them when each man ran to his cannon. When one of his mess mates, Bob Winston, fell, Berkeley took his place. “While the death storm” claimed men and horses all around him, Berkeley marveled at Colonel William Nelson and Lieutenant George Hobson who “walked up and down on the top of our breastworks and gave the orders calmly and deliberately.” “Tears trickled down Hobson’s cheeks as he saw one after another of his brave men go down before this terrible hail.” A shell decapitated fifteen-year-old John Christian. They boy had joined the army six weeks ago. 

After the battle, Berkeley learned that Edmund Anderson was mortally wounded. Praying “that it might be better with him than I hear,” Berkeley had guard duty and could not go see his friend. At three in the morning, a lieutenant offered to take his place, and Berkeley raced for the field hospital. He did not get far before a comrade stopped him and said Edmund was dead. Berkeley went to see the body and noted how Edmund
“looked perfectly natural.” By morning Berkeley discovered that all five of his messmates were casualties. The carnage was so severe that Colonel Nelson ordered Berkeley to write his family and made the mail boy wait for the letter.¹⁹

Within days, a sharpshooter killed Berkeley’s Lieutenant Hobson while he was arranging the burial of two comrades. His loss seemed too much for some men to bear. Robert Stiles wrote home, “my faith is nigh staggered Mother,” because Hobson was “the bravest, cheeriest, most generous spirit in the world” and the “saddest of all the losses of this frightful war.” “Ah! dearest Father, how dead, dead, dead my youth is!” he exclaimed. “Every battle takes some friend,” while other comrades succumbed in Union prisons. Recalling the war’s cost, Stiles admitted, “I loved George Hobson & them all, — more than I knew before, & every few moments the sight of the crushed & hopeless— perhaps raving and sinking widow rises to bring dimmness over the struggling eye of faith, that ‘would see Jesus.’”²⁰

The loss of able leaders and veteran troops changed the character of companies and regiments. Samuel Vann remained confident that although “there are not many of us dirty Rebels here [,] . . . what few of us are here are in fine spirits and can whip many a Yank yet.” Nevertheless, Vann admitted that his company only numbered nineteen and “is so small that it does not require many officers.” Survivors often had to fill many roles. Charles DeNoon found himself in charge of his company because the captain was sick, the lieutenant was wounded, and the sergeant was dead. Likewise, Henry Berkeley acted as gunner, sergeant, and lieutenant, while “Col. Nelson acted as chief of artillery, and our Capt. Kirkpatrick was commanding our battalion. This left us with only one commissioned officer, Bill Harris, recently acting as lieutenant.” “This shows our heavy loss since leaving winter quarters,” he commented. “We started out with four lieutenants; three of these have been killed and the [fourth] has not been seen or heard of for two months.” Casualties such as these compelled Berkeley to write, “our line of march is marked by the graves of the fallen.” In the end, decimated ranks not only depressed the
survivors but raised the possibility that units would be consolidated under new leadership and designations, a prospect that angered veterans who took pride in their regiment’s name and record.\textsuperscript{21}

Veterans who lost comrades and saw their companies shrinking became increasingly critical of shirkers and exempts who could alleviate manpower deficiencies. Within Petersburg’s trenches, Spencer Welch estimated that “we need ten or fifteen thousand more men here, and we could easily get them if the able-bodied exempts would come on here, but they seem to have become hardened to their disgrace.” He wished such men had “seen our poor fellows Thursday night coming in wounded and bleeding and shivering with cold.” Believing that the soldiers “who suffer and have often suffered in this war are the last ones to say surrender,” Welch blamed the Confederacy’s dire condition on stay-at-homes and predicted, “if the South is ever overcome, the contemptible shirkers will be responsible for it.” On the same day, 2 October 1864, Johnny Jackman railed against the “rats” who faked the severity of their wounds to avoid returning to the field. Jackman was recovering from a head injury he received in June 1864. He gleefully watched from his hospital bed in Americus, Georgia, as medical examiners caused “great consternation among the ‘rats’” and hospital attendants. The doctors sent “all who were able to pull a trigger to the front.” The affair reminded Jackman “of traders examining [live]stock.”\textsuperscript{22}

In October 1864, troops across the Confederacy gained renewed hope when Richmond passed General Orders Number 77, a measure that sent thousands of exempts and detailed soldiers to the front lines. Though the order sapped manpower from the Confederate economy, transportation networks, and medical centers, veterans hailed the change as an improvement for the besieged nation. Spencer Welch described the round up of able-bodied men in Richmond:

\begin{quote}
About twelve thousand men from Richmond have been
sent into the trenches at the front. Many of them were in the Government service and many others were gentlemen of leisure. The authorities sent everybody [to the army]. The police would capture men in all parts of the city and send them under guard . . . to be organized and put under the command of officers who happened to be in Richmond from the army. A man told me these officers were seized in the same way on the streets, and that the authorities would even send out and capture a colonel and put him in command of the whole battalion. A medical officer would sometimes be seized. He would plead that he was due at his command and that he was a noncombatant, but they would tell him he was the very man they needed to attend to the wounded. It delights soldiers to hear these things. It does them good all over . . . [and] the miserable skulkers almost die of fright.

Welch’s account exudes the perspective and pride of a veteran. Because soldiers considered their sacrifices emblems of the highest patriotism and the strongest masculinity, they disregarded the value of male noncombatants. Many veteran combatants were so focused on the military side of the war that they missed the glaring fact that men were also required to produce their food and ammunition, transport supplies, treat the wounded, and support the civilians they had left behind.23

Soldiers who required these noncombatant laborers, such as quartermasters, straddled the manpower dilemma. As Thomas Elder watched the government press able-bodied men into the army, “giving the whites muskets and the blacks spades,” he was happy that “Genl Lee seems determined to give Grant a lively time.” But Elder also complained, “this order takes every man I have, without exception” from his quartermaster’s department. Likewise, Edgeworth Bird doubted that the disabled workers he was promised in return for his drivers could perform adequately: “Teamsters should be able-bodied to attend well to the teams and do the heavy, rough work generally before them, but of course it is best to try it. In the present stress of the country, all these men are required, at least that is the verdict of those in command.” While campaigning in the
Shenandoah Valley, Creed Davis learned that his father was now manning Richmond’s trenches. Within weeks the old man fell and sprained his ankle.\textsuperscript{24}

Many soldiers, however, expressed praise and optimism over reinforcements without discussing how local, military needs might differ from national demands, or how their manpower gain signified a loss for the Confederacy elsewhere. In November 1864 Lee’s army obtained 15,000 men from conscripted noncombatants and recuperated veterans. Moreover, another 12,000 men from the detached Second Corps came back to Richmond in December. Bolstering the ranks of Lee’s army not only drained labor from essential industries, but the return of the Second Corps also signified failure in the Shenandoah and the abandonment of that vital farmland to Sheridan’s forces. Veterans seldom mentioned these points. Overestimating the reinforcements at “thirty to forty thousand troops,” John Walters believed these fresh arms would combine with the already “stubborn resistance” exhibited by Rebel defenders to deliver the enemy a crushing defeat. Walters even wished for a massive Federal advance “while we are in as good condition to receive it as we are,” because “unless [Grant] can bring at least three men to our one, he will find that though he may say the ‘Rebellion is on its last legs’, yet he has not the power sufficient to throw it off of them.” Fred Fleet told his parents, “Genl. Lee has been considerably reinforced lately, and you need not be surprised to hear of some move similar to that made in the summer of ‘62,” when Lee repulsed the Army of the Potomac from the gates of Richmond. Considering the army’s growth, Fleet assumed “we will be much stronger than we have been at any time since the campaign of this year commenced and with the continuing smile of Providence, who can doubt our success?”

“The spirit of the men is very good too, and I think I can speak for those of our brigade when I say they will stand and fight until they are completely overpowered.” It is telling that both Walters and Fleet recognized the enemy’s numerical superiority and seemed content to defy the Federals longer even if they could not ultimately overcome them.\textsuperscript{25}
In the end, all these hardships wearied soldiers’ spirits and hardened their sensibilities. Even diehard Rebels had to reconcile perseverance with their yearning for peace. During the Atlanta campaign, Hiram Williams admitted, “there is so much sameness about these days of duty. The same week over and over again that I find it impossible to narrate the events of each day so as to make it at all interesting.” Williams asked himself “a score of times a day” when the war would end. He even expressed his weariness in a long poem that included these lines: “footsore and weary over paths steep and rough / We have fought, we have bled, we have suffered enough.” Williams believed that his rhymes reflected “the real and true sentiments of ninety-nine hundredths of the soldiers. . . and at least four-fifths of those out of the army.” On Christmas Day 1864, John Walters confessed, “I try to think otherwise, but sometimes I fear that we will never be at peace again.” A young artilleryman garrisoned in Charleston harbor stated things plainly enough: “I am tired being a soldier.”

The war’s length and destructiveness also hardened soldiers to the gore that surrounded them. Prevalent sights of shrieking, wounded men, bloated corpses, and disemboweled friends took a heavy toll from many veterans. Soldiers’ desensitized language revealed how much these scenes affected them. Charles Blackford told his daughter how amputated limbs sticking out of a shallow grave made “a very horrid sight, but one we get used to.” He even wrote little “Nannie” about “the most remarkable thing I have seen,” a dried-up corpse of an enemy soldier with a dead dog by his side. Blackford imagined that the man “had some little girl like you who is still hoping for her father’s return and picturing the joy of having him back and romping with the faithful dog.” When Robert Trieves informed a woman of her friend’s death, he failed to restrain his graphic description of the “horribly torn & mangled” body. He told the woman how “the terrible missile stuck him in the left side above the hip, crushing the same, & entering his bowels, which were torn & protruded thro’ the wound, which was very large.” Countless impressions such as this one separated Blackford, Trieves, and other
veterans from the innocence and parlor-room politeness of the civilian world. Or as Fred Fleet put it, the war “deadens the sensibilities and destroys the finer feelings of us all.” When a shell exploded within Henry Berkeley’s artillery limber, it decapitated one horse and tore off the legs of two others but left the rider of the headless horse unscathed. He was “covered from his face to his knees with the brains and blood of the horse,” and Berkeley “could not help being amused at his appearance, yet it was an awful gruesome place to be amused.”

Though these experiences convinced some Rebels to quit the war and go home, most troops braved the conditions and fought on. The same elements that motivated deserters united dichards, because, as Clausewitz observed, “a soldier is just as proud of the hardships he has to overcome as of the dangers he has faced.” Privation fostered Clausewitz’s “true military spirit” within Confederate ranks and marked them as veteran armies. Most Rebels complained occasionally but still venerated each other for enduring the war “without a murmur.” By doing so, they inadvertently used comradeship to push each other to extremes.

*Manufacturing Victories: The 1864 Campaigns*

Before the 1864 campaigns commenced, Rebels across the Confederacy predicted outcomes as bright and hopeful as the southern springtime. The men envisioned climactic clashes and final showdowns that would secure victory and independence. Spencer Welch believed “if we whip the Yankees good again this spring they will quit in disgust. Their cause is not just, like ours, and they are sure to become discouraged more readily.” At Dalton, Georgia, George Binford pronounced the Army of Tennessee “as strong as if not stronger” than ever before, “and the soldiers [are] in high spirits and eager for the fray.” “I can only give my own opinion and of course tis worth but little,” Binford wrote, “but from what I can see and learn, must conclude we will assume the offensive in an early part of spring, I expect to see Mr. Grant flanked on both sides. Our army is in
splendid condition and the only topic is an onward march into Tenn. & Ky.” James Brannock concurred; “rest assured that you will hear a good account of Johnston’s Army during the next twelve months,” he told his wife. “Our prospects seem very cheering. The general impression is that the War will close this year. At any rate, whether it closes in twelve months or twelve years, we have passed the crisis & can never never be a subjugated people. . . . Be brave, [torn paper] & hopeful—all will yet be well.” William Nugent was so confident the war would close in 1864 that he told his wife, “I can afford to transport a scanty wardrobe until then.” “You may tell your friends that I say we are not near whipped; and the Yankees will find it out this spring.” Nugent predicted, “one more grand fight in Georgia; after that we may expect nothing more than raids” from the enemy. Rueben Pierson was so confident in Lee’s army that he announced, “the general health and spirits of this army are altogether unsurpassed by any band of soldiers that history either modern or ancient give an account of and all are eager for the opening of the spring campaign in the full belief that we will be blessed with some grand and glorious victories.” Frank Batchelor also thought “our prospect better now, for a speedy close of the war than at any previous time,” because the Army of Tennessee “is in a fine state of discipline, and confident of victory in the approaching battle. Genl Johnston is the idol of this Army, and is, beyond question, a man of great military genius and energy.”

As these statements suggest, a multitude of influences supported Confederates’ high expectations in 1864. James Brannock and many others hoped for victory because they yearned to go home. He told his wife, “it would make [me] very happy to think that I could be with you before the summer is over to help you in your garden, enjoy your nice flowers, & eat some of those good old-fashioned vegetable dinners which we used to have. And yet I may be – who knows? Stranger things have happened.” Spencer Welch’s prediction relied on his perception of a weak enemy that could not possibly withstand another year of high casualties and futile offensives. Other troops, like William Nugent,
exhibited groundless bravado perhaps in order to convince their families and themselves that the war would end soon and without disastrous results.  

High estimations and genuine hopes for the upcoming campaigns were due in part to the enormous troop reviews that Generals Lee and Johnston orchestrated. When the weather improved, the generals collected, inspected, and displayed their forces so that the men could witness the size, precision, and pride of their army. With hundreds of unfurled flags, thousands of polished rifles and gleaming bayonets, legions of prancing cavalry, column after column of smart-stepping veterans, rows of cannons, and a cadre of commanders atop beautiful steeds, the review raised morale like no other event save a victory or revival. As noted in previous chapters, physical spectacles impressed the men on both emotional and cognitive levels. Chapter Two explained how evangelical meetings displayed an army’s holiness with both passionate service and the staggering sight of hundreds of participants. Grand reviews had a similar impact on soldiers’ pride in their military prowess. Troops saw that they belonged to a giant force composed of crack units and storied brigades. Moreover, reviews were the perfect remedy for the dull isolation of winter quarters. Men who had seen only their closest comrades for months now saw Alabamians, Carolinians, Georgians, Floridians, Kentuckians, Mississippians, Tennesseans, Texans, and more. The entire South seemed gathered together for imminent victory.  

Spectacles of prowess deeply impressed the veterans. James Brannock considered a review of his Corps “a fine sight—I never saw a finer looking body of men.” He thought “a new spirit seems to have been infused into the army since Genl Jo. Johnston took command.” Seeing “3 lines of men 2 rank deep reaching near 3 miles” convinced Thomas Hampton that his was “a beautiful Army in good trim & high spirits.” The memory of being routed at Missionary Ridge the previous November seemed irrelevant, or as Hampton put it, “it does not look much like we was badly whiped to see the amount of troops at this place.” Thomas Key agreed, the “army presented itself in the best
condition that I have ever witnessed it.” “Thousands of hardy soldiers marching to the notes of the shrill fife and bass drum... looked grand and cheering.” According to Key, everyone felt “confident that the next battle will result in a great victory for this army.”

Massive sham battles provided a similar spectacle and gave the men practice at tactical maneuvers. Using blank cartridges, entire corps advanced and retreated against each other. Thomas Key thought “the dark lines of men made a grand display as they moved in battle array, their guns glittering in the sunlight.” Thunderous musketry echoed off the surrounding mountains and “sounded very much like a real battle.” Thomas Hampton agreed that the “magnificent sight... looked verry [sic] much like a genuine Battle.” Four lines of men were drawn up in opposition to each another and reached “over a mile & a Half.” “They marched up in some 50 yards of each other & fired with all of the artillery & small arms.” In addition to their officers, “thousands [were] there to witness the scene,” including many ladies from Atlanta. After participating in several big combat simulations, Laffayette Orr told his brother “we have better armies in the field now than we had twelve months ago, and we are better armed and better dissipland; and ower men are in better spirits.” The experience emboldened the young man:

Why should we give it up nowwhin so many of ower brave comrades have fell and so much blud have been shed. I ask you as a brother fight it out to the last, never give it up, and bee put on an [equal] footing with the negros. I say no. I will fight them ten years [illegible] independence. I have never disspended yet. I have passed through several hard fought battles, and I can tell you I have all ways stood to my post.

The only news that discouraged young Lafayette was word that the girls back home were marrying shirkers. For some soldiers the spectacle of sham battles and reviews lasted well into the active campaign. In June 1864 Fred Fleet told his parents “if you could only see the Army, you would never feel any anxiety about Richmond. Lee is stronger than when the fighting commenced & his men, as well as those of the gallant Beauregard are in the
best possible trim.” The very sight of their own numbers both heartened Confederates and distracted them from the enemy's superior manpower.\textsuperscript{33}

No Confederates had more confidence in themselves and their leaders than Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. As J. Tracy Power noted in his study of the army's final campaign, “many officers and men simply assumed that a Confederate victory was both forthcoming and inevitable,” and “predictions for the coming campaign differed more in their degrees of enthusiasm than in questions of whether the Army of Northern Virginia would succeed.” As cavalryman Robert Tutwiler put it, “every soldier feels as confident of success as if we had already achieved it.”\textsuperscript{34}

Their confidence came from a keen awareness that they had beaten their opponents more often than not during the war. And though many of their best and bravest men were dead, the army took comfort in the knowledge that its surviving veterans sustained the spirit and ability of their fabled units. In early 1864 the government insured the army's veteran composition by requiring all the men whose three-year enlistments were expiring to stay in the ranks. Richmond also bolstered military manpower by expanding the draft age limits to seventeen and fifty, eliminating substitutions, and abolishing most exemptions from service. Regardless of the law, thousands of old volunteers reenlisted “for the war” as a response to massive re-enlistments in the Army of Tennessee. In February 1864 Lee told his army that the wave of voluntarism “gives new cause for the gratitude and admiration of their countrymen.” He hoped the movement will “extend from army to army until the Soldiers of the South stand in one embattled host determined never to yield.”\textsuperscript{35}

Because of poor weather and careful preparation, the troops waited until May to fulfill their general’s high hopes. After midnight on 4 May 1864, General Phil Sheridan’s troopers started the 1864 campaign for Richmond, when they spearheaded the Army of the Potomac’s crossing of the Rapidan River. Within the day, 115,000 Union men pensively rested within the Wilderness, a tangled terrain of brush and low trees where
Lee had flanked them and Stonewall Jackson had died exactly one year before. The Confederates, 65,000 strong, hoped to pen the foe within this natural maze and replicate that triumph at Chancellorsville. Significantly though, Lee underestimated the enemy’s size at 75,000, a number that would have given the general in gray the best odds he had ever faced against the Army of the Potomac. Soldiers on both sides felt the imminent events like a charged cloud. “What momentous interests, public and private are bound up in the result and hang on the issue,” Charles Blackford wrote on May 4. He believed that “peace follows victory and subjugation defeat.”

On the following day, two Rebel corps raced eastward along parallel roads and hit three Federal corps marching south from the Rapidan. Though artillery proved useless within the thicket, opposing infantry stumbled upon each other with grim results. Throughout the day, jumbled lines of foot soldiers pushed and propelled each other for control of two road intersections that were critical to the Union advance southward. Conditions in the woodland were nightmarish. Men lost their units within the labyrinth. Tramping footfalls, gunfire, and screams sounded close by, but foliage masked friend or foe. Worse still, smoke cloaked the dense woods, sparks ignited the forest, and fires consumed the immobile wounded. At nightfall bluecoats held the roads.

On the second day, May 6, both armies fortified their lines and funneled fresh units into the quagmire. A Federal assault knocked the Confederates back a mile, before a Texas brigade checked their progress. Then a Rebel advance pressed the northerners almost back to their starting point and threatened the Union left flank. Confederate success seemed imminent when a Rebel volley wounded General James Longstreet and deflated the graybacks’ momentum. An evening maneuver against the Union right flank also achieved initial success, but the Federals held their ground. The battle closed with mixed results. Though the Confederates failed to terrorize and rout the enemy as they had a year ago, their 65,000 stopped 115,000 invaders and inflicted about 18,000 casualties while sustaining a loss of 8,000. But the Wilderness proved to be a graveyard of the
Rebel command. Generals John Jones and Micah Jenkins were dead, General Leroy Stafford was dying, and Generals John Pegram, Henry Benning, and Longstreet were wounded. The final man, Lee’s most dependable corps commander, would miss five crucial months of the campaign.  

A host of influences, including emotions, the dense forest, and the soldiers’ worms-eye view of combat, combined to make Rebels’ perceptions of the Wilderness as murky as the surrounding terrain. J. Tracy Power has noted, “the ebb and flow of such a battle, in which both sides lost some positions they defended but captured some positions defended by the enemy, blurred distinctions between tactical success and failure.” Some Confederate assessments of the contest reflect this ambivalence and uncertainty. On May 7 Thomas Elder wrote his wife, “the battle is not ended and the result is uncertain.” Though he thought “the advantage thus far seems to be with us,” he admitted that casualties were high, “the enemy fights most stubbornly,” and “the prevailing opinion is a decisive engagement will be fought today.” When Creed Davis’s unit left the battleground the following day, “the Yankee wounded in the wayside hospitals hurrahed as we passed them, thinking we were retreating to Richmond. Ere long they will know better.” But as he headed south, Davis conceded, “God only knows what will become of us.”  

Despite the battle’s uncertain results, many Rebels considered the Wilderness a victory. For these men the same elements that caused some comrades to doubt the battle’s outcome, especially their limited perspective of the contest, accommodated optimism and the construction of victorious accounts. Samuel Harper wrote home that the Confederates had “gained another great victory,” and he only regretted that the enemy position was too strong for the Rebels to “attack & make [the achievement] complete.” Foremost in soldiers’ claims to triumph was the misconception that they had driven the enemy for miles, when in fact the final lines were almost identical to the adversaries’ initial positions. A Virginia captain reported, “we have repulsed the Yankees in every instance,
& have driven them several miles. We hold the field. . . . They say that no army in the world can stand our charges.” While the battle still raged on May 5, Henry Berkeley recorded that his unit “had driven the Yankees nearly three miles and. . . . brought out an entire Yankee regiment.” Likewise, on May 5 Charles Blackford thought “the whole line of the enemy has been forced back about a mile today, and they have made four or five successive charges on our lines and have been repulsed at great loss.” The next day he announced, “the result of the last two days has been decidedly in our favor. We have thus far captured four guns, three thousand prisoners, including three brigadiers. We have driven the enemy from the battle-field some two miles and hold all his dead and wounded.” Blackford admitted, “on our side the loss has been heavy, of course, [but] not so much as in a general engagement.”

Confederates also claimed to have command over the field of battle and remarked on the enemy’s high casualties. Looking over the battlefield, Edgeworth Bird thought, “the Yankee loss must be tremendous.” Spencer Welch observed how the battleground was strewn with Federal “overcoats, knapsacks, India rubber cloths and everything else soldiers carry,” and “the dead Yankees are everywhere.” These impressions can be explained by the fact that the Rebels were initially pushed back a mile before they regained ground in a series of counterattacks. The ebb and flow of the contest left thousands of enemy casualties and much of the contested territory behind Lee’s line. These two apparent results, tactical control over the battleground and the spectacle of enemy dead and wounded, influenced Rebels’ perceptions of the military situation for the rest of the war.

Instead of retreating after the bloodbath, as was customary of Federal commanders in the East, Grant marched past Lee’s right flank and headed south. The move elated Union troops and left the Confederates with two options: fight or retreat to keep between the enemy and Richmond. By May 8 the Rebels had swung ahead of their larger, more cumbersome opponents and begun constructing enormous fieldworks at the
crossroads around Spotsylvania Court House. Union troops heading down the pike discovered two lines of Rebel trenches, artillery emplacements, a cleared field of fire, and abatis fixed within point-blank range. By using the spade, Lee’s veterans were adapting to the war’s intensification. The first Federal columns attacked these positions throughout May 8 without success.  

After a day of relative quiet and maneuvering, the Union ranks slammed both sides of the Confederate defenses and temporarily seized a salient in Lee’s center. When northern troops failed to reinforce the advance brigade led by Federal Colonel Emory Upton, Rebels concentrated on the breach and recovered the position. On May 11 sheets of rain stopped the contest and gave the generals time to assess the situation. So far Spotsylvania had cost the Union 7,000 casualties, while the Rebels had lost only a third of that number. Washington was anxious for news, and many southerners, including Lee, expected the enemy to disengage and move by their right flank again. In anticipation of this, Lee removed twenty-two guns from the salient in order to quicken the upcoming march.  

The transfer of cannon proved premature and costly. Before daylight on May 12, an entire Union corps replicated Upton’s charge upon the same salient, forever after known as the “Bloody Angle.” Materializing through the morning fog, 15,000 bluecoats captured much of the famous Stonewall brigade and split the Army of Northern Virginia in two. A division of Virginians and Georgians counterattacked and somehow pushed the Federals back to the tip of the salient. As rain came down, reinforcements from both sides rushed to the point of contact, and thousands of belligerents dug in on opposite sides of the same breastwork. Here neither side yielded a yard, and a frenzied struggle of man-to-man combat ensued. Men pulled their adversaries over the earthwork and clubbed them to death or stabbed them through chinks in the log barricade. Charged with adrenaline, individuals mounted the wall, fired into the mass below, and flung their discharged rifles like spears. Comrades fed these parapet daredevils loaded muskets until they were killed.
Crowded troops squeezed together for cover and pressed the dead and wounded into the churned mud and gore. Men who had just survived the Wilderness experienced a battle that was incomprehensibly worse. As the day wore on, the troops’ combat high subsided into a vacant temperament. Psychologically numbed, the veterans killed each other with mechanical detachment. The slaughter continued unabated for eighteen hours.44

When the last Confederates finally fell back to a second entrenchment at dawn on May 13, both sides had lost about 5,000–6,000 men. Since the first firefight in the Wilderness a week before, Grant’s troops suffered 32,000 men killed, wounded, and missing—a total that was half of Lee’s army and a loss that exceeded the casualties of “all Union armies combined in any previous week of the war.” The Rebels had lost about 18,000 men during this time, and their leaders continued to pay a heavy toll. Twenty of Lee’s fifty-seven commanders of infantry corps, divisions, and brigades were sacrificed, while Grant lost ten of his sixty-nine officers of that rank.45

As they did after the Wilderness, many Confederates claimed victory at Spotsylvania. Few Rebels were as honest as Spencer Welch, who told his wife, “you know as much about the situation [here]—or more—than I do, for, although we are right here, we know nothing unless we see the newspapers.” Once again the ebb and flow of the battle encouraged exaggerations of how far the enemy was driven. On May 10 John Walters asserted that his division “pushed forward and soon had the enemy on a run, driving them out of three lines of breastworks... [and] across the Ny River.” Summing up the day’s activity, he claimed, “we, with a force of some eight thousand and eight pieces of artillery... drove back some four or five miles a corps of the enemy numbering from twenty to thirty thousand with at least twelve pieces of artillery.” This was false. First, the Rebel lines were one mile from the Ni, and Walters admitted that the Confederates did not cross the river, so they could not have pushed their opponents for four or five miles. Second, the total number of Federals engaged that day was 38,000, and Walters’s group did not engage the majority of them. At most, Walters’s unit propelled
an enemy force twice their size one mile beyond the Rebel lines—quite an accomplishment, but not the spectacular results Walters reported.46

The greatest Confederate exaggerations about Spotsylvania concerned the results of May 12 at the Bloody Angle. Rebels admitted that General Edward Johnson and his division were overrun and captured at the start of the day, but most writers stressed General John Gordon’s counterattack and the graybacks’ efforts at the tip of the salient. Walters announced, “the day is ours, as far as it can be to an army whose entire policy is defensive,” and estimated the enemy’s loss at the Angle to be “at least four or five to our one.” Thomas Elder agreed, “we lost quite a number of prisoners but the enemy’s loss in killed and wounded is supposed to outnumber ours three to four to one.” He told his wife, “the slaughter of the Yankees was terrible.” “With the exception of the partially successful attack on Johnson’s division,” Charles Blackford wrote, “the enemy have not, in a single instance, been successful.” He thought the Bloody Angle “was the most one-sided affair possible”:

They made repeated and very gallant attacks on our breastworks and were as often driven back again with great loss of life to them and none to us. Our corps lost only fifty men killed and wounded, while I am satisfied from what I saw with my own eyes that the enemy left unburied in front of our troops alone at the very least one thousand dead, and they buried as many as they could reach and all killed behind their lines. This represents a loss of killed and wounded and many thousands, almost as many as we have in the corps. There is no exaggeration in this statement.

Blackford estimated the enemy’s total loss at the Angle to be 20,000–30,000 men and the Rebels’ casualties to be 6,000. Though Blackford averred, “I make my statement from what I saw the day of the battle and from a closer inspection of the field since,” his numbers were grossly miscalculated. The Rebels who held the Angle faced tremendous disadvantages in men and firepower. Enfilading musketry, artillery, and mortars pounded
them for hours. Union bullets even felled trees twenty-two inches thick. Moreover, the Confederates held their position not because they were winning the struggle, but because Lee needed them to plug a whole in his lines. Exact figures for Lee’s army are unavailable, but it is likely that the Rebels sacrificed as many men as the Federals lost, about 6,000.47

Many Confederates considered the Wilderness and Spotsylvania one great victory and overestimated the enemy’s total casualties. Through word of mouth, Rebels convinced themselves that Grant had lost 50,000 men. “Ham” Chamberlayne wrote home that “we have punished the Yanks dreadfully; both here & at the Wilderness[.] Their loss must touch 50 to 60 000 all told—They still move against us, but feebly.” Robert Stiles concurred that Grant “is awfully repulsed—his losses in killed & wounded being at least 3 or 4 to 1; probably the disproportion is even greater. I really presume his loss will sum up 50,000.” Like Chamberlayne, Stiles thought the enemy’s recent attacks were “feeble.” He told his sister, “do not be too confident, yet you may encourage an almost buoyant hope in these days of constant repeated victory.” Charles Blackford thought, “50,000 would not cover the enemy’s loss.” Charles DeNoon confirmed that the “Yankee loss [is] supposed to be 55 to 60 thousand. Our loss [is] estimated at 10 to 12 thousand.”48

High morale contributed to Rebels’ positive assessments. Despite the bloodshed, terror, and fatigue, Lee’s men remained high-spirited and hopeful. While the fighting escalated around the crossroads on May 9, John Walters claimed, “our troops are in the best of spirits.” After the horror of the Bloody Angle, Thomas Elder wrote, “our men are in excellent spirits and express a willingness and determination to die in the ditch rather than that Grant should get to Richmond.” A week later, still fighting at Spotsylvania, Elder announced his men “are in good condition and ready for another fight. I don’t suppose the world ever saw a more determined better contented people under similar circumstances than is presented by Genl Lee’s army at this time.” Robert Trieves agreed
that the army “is in good spirits & confident of victory.” High morale encouraged the production and reception of overly optimistic assessments of the battles.49

Grant continued to test the Confederate works at Spotsylvania for another week at a cost of 3,000 more men. On May 21 the Army of the Potomac swept southward by the Rebel right flank again, but the gray army beat them to the South Anna River and fortified its banks. A Confederate corps launched an unsuccessful attack on May 23, and the Union force marched another twenty miles down river. Once again Lee’s troops used interior lines to check the enemy’s march (this time with trenches along Totopotomy Creek). The Rebels were now only nine miles northeast of Richmond. “Although half-starved from lack of rations, the southerners were still full of fight,” James McPherson has written. During the last days of May, Grant led his men southward again to a crossroads named Cold Harbor. Many of his troops recognized the site from the battle they fought at Gaines Mill in 1862, the last time Federals were so close to capturing the Rebel capital.50

The bone-weary fighters from both armies congregated at the crossroads of Cold Harbor and began the now routine task of digging trenches. By June 2 opposing lines stretched seven miles from the Totopotomy to the Chickahominy. Despite the past weeks of constant bloodshed, 59,000 Rebels faced 109,000 Union men. Both armies had found reinforcements. Nevertheless, the Federals lost 44,000 men in May (including three-year veterans whose enlistment ended) while the Confederates suffered about 25,000 casualties. Grant was also running out of options. Marching past Lee’s right flank once more would corner the Union army on the Peninsula where George McClellan had found disaster two years before. Moreover, a flank maneuver so close to the capital could send Lee’s army into Richmond’s formidable defenses, and Grant still hoped to lure his enemy into the open and annihilate him. Though both sides had performed remarkably well thus far, Grant thought his troops retained a higher morale than the Rebels. Having the larger, better supplied army, Grant assumed his opponents were worse off in every way: if
Federal troops were tired, the Confederates must be jaded; if the Union men were hungry, the Rebels must be starving. "Lee’s army is really whipped," Grant wrote General Henry Halleck, and he ordered a massive assault on June 3 to prove it.51

But Lee’s Confederates showed they were far from whipped. At Cold Harbor, the butternut veterans manipulated the terrain with deadly artistry: they construct fields of enfilading fire, built formidable earthworks with traverses where necessary, and left swampy sectors tantalizingly exposed. Using a synergy of instinct and experience, the Rebels seemed to become a part of the ground, or as one scholar has put it, “they flowed onto and into the landscape as if in response to a natural law, like water seeking its own level.” The men assigned with the task of taking these works understood their craftsmanship, and many Union troops fatalistically pinned their name and address to their backs to insure that their bodies would be identified. At morning, three corps of the blue men struck for the line with a deep-throated roar. Confederates answered with a deafening blast of musketry that cloaked the field in smoke and rattled windows in Richmond. The closer the Federals came, the deeper they entrapped themselves within concave Rebel works. The assault ended in eight minutes, and when the smoke wafted upward, northern bodies covered five acres of ground. The dead lay in every conceivable position, the wounded cried for help, and the living dug in for cover against the murderous hail. For nine hours Grant ordered a renewed assault, but the men refused to do anything but hug the earth and offer intermittent fire. It was one of the most lopsided engagements of the war: 7,000 Union casualties at a cost of fewer than 1,500 Confederates.52

Confederate accounts stressed the disparity in casualties. Henry Berkeley reported, “our infantry lost hardly a man. The Yankee loss was very heavy.” Suffering from lack of sleep, Creed Davis remarked, “the enemy charged our right last night. But were repulsed with considerable loss.” Philip Collins thought the Federal attacks at Cold Harbor were “the most desperate charges made by the yankees this Campeign . . . but
they had been handsomely repulsed on every occasion with great slaughter.” He asserted, “our army is just as far from being whipped now as it was” when the campaign started. “From all accounts the yankees are pretty badly whipped now and if they dont mind it they will bee whipped wors than they hav ever been before.” Charles Blackford wrote, “all agree that the loss to the enemy was as heavy as it ever had been on any field.” Though he acknowledged “it is hard to get the truth of what happens now and happens just in our front,” Blackford did not hesitate to assess Rebel casualties at 100 and Federal losses at 10,000. He insisted, “this would not be an over-estimate.” “The world, our world, is making history now,” he proclaimed. Thomas Elder was not so confident. Though he also reported how Rebels had “repulsed the attacks of the enemy,” he did not expect Grant to retreat and knew “there must be some hard fighting yet before the issue is decided.”53

After the failed Union assaults of June 3, both sides held their lines for days. Thousands of wounded Federals left in no-man’s land cried for help, but Grant refused to ask for a truce to collect them because such a request was akin to admitting defeat. The crying and pleading of the wounded diminished day after day, until June 7 when a rescue party finally left the Union works. They discovered two men still alive. On the night of June 12–13, the bluecoats at last departed from Cold Harbor, swinging overland and across the James towards Petersburg. When advanced units reached the city’s defenses, they hesitated to attack the earthworks and failed to realize that General P. G. T. Beauregard had only 2,500 men to protect his line. The road to Richmond was virtually unimpeded, but seven weeks of breaking against formidable Rebel trenches had cost the Federals 65,000 men and much of their fighting spirit.54

The Confederates caught up with the Army of the Potomac in time to save Petersburg and Richmond, but the spring campaign had taken at least 35,000 of their comrades thus far, and there was no end in sight. Through the rest of June and July, the Rebels tried to break the enemy’s tightening grip upon their lines. Though none of these
attempts produced permanent results, many Rebels celebrated them as tactical successes. A June 22 attack against a gap in the Union works received attention and praise from many Confederates. Three gray divisions surprised the Federals, seized their first trench, and captured 1,600 men. It hardly seemed to matter to John Walters that the enemy reclaimed the position the next day:

Mahone with three of his brigades flanked the enemy on our right and in a short time succeeded in capturing fifteen or eighteen hundred prisoners, four guns, and five or six stands of colors. He came upon them so suddenly that they could make no resistance, which is proven by the fact that he lost but two men, one killed and one wounded. He also held the portion of the line from which he made the capture, which the enemy attempted to regain during the early part of the night. They were repulsed three times, losing heavily. After this our brigade fell back to their original line. Mahone deserves, and will undoubtedly receive, great credit for this affair, as it was executed with much of the dash for which Stonewall Jackson was so greatly celebrated.

Charles DeNoon thought “Petersburg is safe” after Mahone’s assault. He told his parents the same details that Walters related: Confederates carried the enemy works, took 1,800 prisoners and six pieces of artillery, repulsed three counterattacks, and then (inexplicably) returned to their original lines. A week later a raid bagged supply wagons, ambulances, artillery pieces, and hundreds of enemy prisoners and former slaves. Again, DeNoon celebrated the event, even though it lacked strategic value. Paul Higginbotham also thought such news was “cheering.” “It is mighty hard for me to get the correct state of affairs about P[etersburg]. . . . but on the whole, I don’t think that Grant is gaining any ground on us, nor do I think he can continue this campaign much longer.” Such events convinced many Confederates that their army could still out-smart, out-maneuver, and outlast the enemy. Spencer Welch wrote his wife, “it now looks as if our army will have to lie in line of battle all summer to keep the Yankees back. Poor devils! How they do
long for Richmond! Our minds are prepared to endure anything rather than submit to them, and the nearer they get to us the more determined we are not to yield."55

On July 30 the enemy punctuated weeks of trench-life drudgery by exploding a mine they had tunneled beneath the Rebel lines. Four tons of gunpowder blasted a crater 125 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 25 feet deep. The concussion buried a Confederate regiment and artillery battery and drove adjacent defenders rearward in panic. But three Federal divisions, the lead one consisting of black troops, crossed the field and charged into the hole and debris instead of around it and into the empty Rebel works. Missing an opportunity to capture hundreds of yards of trenches and perhaps gain a strategic breach, the Federals gawked at the awesome sight, while Confederates mounted a counterattack. By the end of the day, the Rebels recovered their lines and inflicted 4,000 casualties while suffering fewer than half as many.56

Confederates did not hesitate to proclaim the Crater a colossal failure for their adversaries. Charles Blackford told his wife, “we certainly hold our old line, and the enemy took nothing by his attack but a severe repulse. . . . His strategy was a complete fizzle.” Giles Buckner Cooke exaggerated the disparity of casualties at 500 to 800 Rebels and 5,000 Federals and described the Confederate counterattack as “grand and glorious.” Paul Higginbotham also assessed Grant’s losses as ten times Lee’s, but he estimated them at 250 Rebels and 2,500 Unionists. Moreover, the Federal disaster convinced him that “Grant, great as he is thought to be by the Northern Fanatics, is no more a match for our Noble Lee.” Ham Chamberlayne considered the Crater “a brilliant & important victory, achieved by 1/3 of our force concentrated & with comparatively light loss.” He rejoiced that “a month of mining, [Grant’s] whole force concentrated, [and] his own time & place selected enabled him only to lose from 4500 to 5000 men & gain nothing.” “We hold every foot of ground & they have not advanced an inch,” he crowed.57

Though neither side could know it at the time, the Crater exemplified the strategic deadlock that would grip adversaries around Petersburg and Richmond until April 1865.
Tactical blows continued to bleed both armies but failed to break either one. While detached units in the Shenandoah Valley and western armies from Georgia to the Trans-Mississippi replicated the fluid campaigns of the early war, the trenches in eastern Virginia foreshadowed the frozen stalemates of World War I. Throughout this period, Grant coordinated attacks against multiple positions along Lee’s line in the hopes of hitting his opponents at a weak spot in their attenuated defenses. These multiple blows often struck north and south of the James River to threaten Richmond and Petersburg and to hamper the enemy’s ability to reinforce both positions. In August the Petersburg strikes concentrated on the Weldon Railroad, a vital supply line for Lee’s troops. The Federals seized and held the rail line south of town, forcing the Rebels to detour provisions by mule train. In late August, Confederate assaults on the Union works along the railway inflicted 4,300 casualties (many of them prisoners) at a cost of 1,600 to 2,300 men, but the Federals maintained their position.  

Even though the Rebels who participated in these attacks knew their attempt to control the railroad had failed, some of them claimed victory based on the disparity of casualties. Charles Blackford’s assessment, “we repulsed the enemy all along the whole line with great loss to him and very little to us,” was becoming a cliché in Confederate reports. Thomas Elder admitted that the enemy still held the railroad, but he stressed that “we captured about 3000 prisoners and lost three or four hundred. Our loss in killed and wounded was not heavy. The enemy’s killed and wounded is said to have been large.” John Vincent estimated the number of prisoners taken to be 2,700 and failed to mention that the enemy withstood the assault. John Walters admitted “it will be necessary to dislodge him” from the railroad and found hope in reports that “large reinforcements are being sent” to finish the job.  

A few days later, Confederate assaults on Union forces that were tearing up track near Reams Station inflicted lopsided casualties and managed to propel the bluecoats from a portion of the railroad. The Federals lost 2,700 troops and nine cannon, while the
Confederates sacrificed 800 men killed, wounded, and captured. The identity of these beaten bluecoats seemed as significant as the battle’s results. The Rebels had bested Winfield Hancock’s vaunted Second Corps, the legion that had crushed Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg and seized the Bloody Angle at Spotsylvania. Hancock’s men had taken forty Rebel flags before relinquishing one of their own; then at Reams Station they surrendered twelve of their colors in a single day. The corps’ manpower and spirit had diminished so much that Grant decided after Reams Station to reserve its remnants for defensive assignments. This deterioration of the best units in the Army of the Potomac heartened Confederates that the enemy was suffering more from the grinding campaign than the Rebels were.\textsuperscript{60}

Reams Station also convinced Lee’s troops that they could still whip the enemy in an offensive engagement. Moreover, the victory was led by Ambrose Powell Hill, a general who had achieved major feats under Stonewall Jackson but subsequently failed to meet Confederates’ expectations. Optimistic Rebels hoped this minor triumph marked the return of “Little Powell’s” brilliance. Other Confederates continued to focus on the fact that they inflicted at least twice the number of casualties they sustained. When John Vincent tabulated the enemy’s losses in his diary, he magnified their casualties to 4,150 men. Edgeworth Bird thought Grant’s losses had been so severe in the preceding weeks that “at this rate, he must soon be shorn of his strength.” Matching Bird’s estimate of the enemy’s manpower, John Walters considered the prisoners taken at Reams Station to be “the most miserable looking set that I have ever seen, and many of them are too young to be engaged in the dreadful business of war.” Many Rebels who did not know (or refused to believe) the size of the Army of the Potomac started to convince themselves that the constant punishment they were giving the enemy would decide the conflict in their favor, before Lee’s army was broken from attrition. Ham Chamberlayne expressed this mentality a month after Reams Station: “I have known for months that gloomy times
would come before Grant was ruined—Having courage & plenty of men of course he masses on us—but we will whip him yet."\textsuperscript{51}

If Reams Station bolstered many Confederates' faith in their infantry's prowess, General Wade Hampton's cavalry raid in September summoned memories and comparisons to J. E. B. Stuart's brilliant escapades of the early war. Receiving intelligence that 3,000 Federal cattle were poorly guarded at Coogins' Point on the James River, Hampton collected a division of horse soldiers, slipped by Union cavalry, and captured 2,500 head of cattle, 300 prisoners, and several wagons. The adventure cost sixty casualties. When the southern cowboys herded their prizes through the streets of Petersburg, the poorly fed defenders could hardly believe their eyes. For two weeks they enjoyed fine beef in their rations.\textsuperscript{62}

The Rebels could not relish their improved fare for long, because Grant tried another coordinated attack during the final days of September. On September 29 Federals captured Fort Harrison, a piece of Richmond's outer defenses, and almost seized the adjacent works at Fort Gilmer. While Confederate counterattacks on the following day failed to regain the fort, Union troops struck south of Petersburg. Here the contested ground near Poplar Spring Church changed hands a couple of times before Rebels secured a position close to their original works. On October 1 a Confederate assault from this line failed to dislodge the Federals, and both settled into their new locations. The four-day engagement cost 6,000 Union and 3,000 Rebel casualties. The Federals could pride themselves on taking and holding enemy lines, while the Confederates could boast that they had beaten back another assault on Richmond and Petersburg and once again inflicted 2:1 losses on the foe.\textsuperscript{63}

This pattern of stalemates continued through the winter of 1864–1865. In October, Confederate offensives failed, but their defensive efforts halted Federal advances and dealt heavy casualties. As Rebels entered their fifth and sixth months of trench warfare in Virginia, some men voiced confidence that they could hold out against
any odds for any period of time. As Thomas Goree told his brother, “we are quietly settled down here, I suppose for the winter, or until Genl. Grant arrives at the conclusion that it is useless for him to longer expend his energies & resources in a vain endeavor to take Richmond.” Goree thought Grant persisted because “he does not know what else to do. He knows that to storm our works would destroy his army. And, whatever way he turns, he can’t go far before he encounters Confederate bayonets.” He boasted, “you all in the Trans-Miss. Dep’t. need have no fears about Richmond unless Grant can get a much larger army than he has at present.” Spencer Welch agreed, “Grant has come to a dead halt before Petersburg and Richmond.” Fred Fleet compared the Confederate position to the siege of Sebastopol, which lasted eleven months during the Crimean War. As Fleet argued, “the allied armies of England and France remained in the trenches before Sebastopol in a climate far colder than our own and certainly men fighting for liberty and right, dearer than life itself, can endure as many hardships as troops contending for political advancement and military honors have shown themselves able to bear.” Despite the strain of life in the trenches, thousands of Lee’s men vowed to outlast the foe. As John Walters expressed it, “having put my hand to the plow I shall finish the row.”

The Army of Tennessee

In early May 1864, while the campaign for Richmond ignited in the Wilderness, the advance for Atlanta began in three mountain passes south of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Each campaign’s beginning foreshadowed its character. In Virginia, Grant and Lee traded blows day and night in search of the decisive battle that would win the war. In Georgia Sherman and Johnston maneuvered around each other in the hopes of securing victory without the bloodshed of a complete offensive assault. Their armies matched the numbers contesting in Virginia: 98,000 for Sherman and 65,000 for Johnston. If the seemingly interminable combat in Virginia challenged Confederates to find hope in high enemy casualties and minor tactical gains, the seemingly unending retreat in Georgia challenged
Rebels to retain hope that the culminating battle, whenever and wherever it was fought, would be a stunning triumph. The faith that thousands of these soldiers kept in their generals and comrades is remarkable not only because of their constant retreating, but also because their army’s past lacked the glory garnered by Lee’s troops. One reason for their confidence was their veteran status. These men had lost many battles and changed commanders often since their first day at Shiloh in April 1862, but they knew how to fight and believed they would win with the right general and propitious circumstances. An Alabama soldier expressed this mentality well: “General Johnston has infused new life into the army and we feel that now is the time to retrieve the misfortunes which have befallen us in the past and if we can meet Sherman on anything like an equal footing we have no fears of the result.”

During the first weeks of May all the ingredients for success seemed to materialize at Dalton, Georgia. Aided by mountainous terrain and strong streams that bisected the hundred miles between Sherman’s supply base at Chattanooga and his goal, Atlanta, the Confederates rimmed Rocky Face Ridge, guarded the mountain passes, and taunted the Federals to test their works at Dalton. As bluecoats spilled into the basin within the mountains’ morning shadow, they faced a steep, wooded incline that rose to a perpendicular stone curtain that gave Rocky Face its name. Boulders formed natural parapets above the precipice, and the Rebels fanned out as thin as skirmishers to pick off their assailants from safe places. Locals appropriately called this spot Buzzard Roost. Upon examining the Rebel defenses, Sherman dubbed them the “terrible door of death” and decided to outflank the Confederates. While Federal forces equal to Johnston’s army probed the Dalton works, 25,000 men under General James McPherson swung right, pushed through a lightly guarded mountain pass, and threatened Resaca, Georgia, a railroad juncture fifteen miles behind the Confederate army. Looking more formidable than their numbers, the defenders at Resaca convinced McPherson to withdraw without a fight, and Johnston hurried reinforcements down the railroad. On May 12–13, the entire
Confederate army slid from their Dalton defenses and joined their comrades at Resaca. The dream of Sherman’s legions breaking in blood upon Rocky Face never materialized.\textsuperscript{66}

The retreat from Rocky Face Ridge dumbfounded men who had inflicted disparate casualties on the enemy at Dalton and did not grasp the implications of Sherman’s flanking movement. Benjamin Seaton was elated that “the enemy charged our works several times and was repulsed evertime with heavy loss.” On the day before the retreat, Seaton was still “awaiting the approach of the enemy.” “If he was to come the boys wold give a warm recepcion with what is cald the Confederate Blue pill wich is vary poisen to the Yankees when administered in the proper channel.” Men like Seaton wondered why Johnston was retreating from a position as sure as a turkey shoot. George Binford thought “at Dalton we had the strongest natural position I ever saw.” Even some officers questioned the move. James Brannock admitted, “we don’t understand it, but have confidence in Gen. Johnston.” Moreover, Brannock considered his men “still hopeful.” “I have never seen troops in better fighting condition,” he told his wife. “Our noble Tennessee boys, God bless them, are fighting like tigers & pouring out their blood like water.”\textsuperscript{67}

Events repeated themselves at Resaca. Sherman’s three wings, led by Generals McPherson, George Thomas, and John Schofield, took a beating against strong Confederate defenses before Sherman disengaged McPherson again and sent him swinging to the right. This time the young general crossed the Oostanaula River and threatened Johnston’s railroad connections near Adairsville. The graybacks backpedaled twenty-five miles to this town, stung advancing Union columns, and retreated another ten miles to Cassville. In twelve days Johnston had retreated halfway to Atlanta at a cost of roughly 5,000 casualties to both sides—losses similar to the daily toll in Virginia.\textsuperscript{68}

At Cassville, Johnston promised his troops that the time and place for fighting had finally arrived. Confederate forces under John Bell Hood and Leonidas Polk were poised
to destroy two isolated Union corps as they descending down multiple roads. On May 19 Johnston addressed his men:

You have displayed the highest qualities of the soldier—firmness in combat, patience under toil. By your courage and skill you have repulsed every assault of the enemy. By marches by day and marches by night you have defeated every attempt upon your communications. Your communications are secured. You will now turn and march to meet his advancing columns. Fully confiding in the conduct of the officers, the courage of the soldiers, I lead you to battle. We may confidently trust that the Almighty Father will still reward the patriots’ toils and the patriots’ banners. Cheered by the success of our brothers in Virginia and beyond the Mississippi, our efforts will equal theirs. Strengthened by His support, these efforts will be crowned with the like glories.

The speech electrified the troops. John Jackman described it as “Napoleonic.” Cheers erupted through the ranks. According to James Brannock, “our lines of battle were formed immediately, every body in the highest spirits, & the men, although worn out with fatigue & loss of rest, were eager for the great struggle & confident of victory.” After waiting with anticipation for hours, “we were startled by an order from Gen. Hardee to pack up in all haste & to leave immediately.” General Hood, usually anything but overcautious, feared his flank was being passed by a large enemy force and called off his attack. The bluecoats turned out to be a cavalry detachment, but the Rebels lost their chance to strike. That night they retreated ten miles, crossed the Etowah River, and stopped at Allatoona.69

Pulling back after Johnston’s glorious pronouncement affected morale. When the order to retreat reached James Brannock and his men, “we were perfectly astounded,” he wrote. “For the first time the men begin to grumble & become dispirited.” To further rankle them, the frantic retreat was “sort of a dog trot all the way” with artillerymen and teamsters whipping their horses and officers hollering for the men to close ranks. John
Cotton told his wife, "there is a heap of our men thinks we are whipped because we have fell back." He hated "very much haveing to give up so much of our own cuntry to the enemy to bee destroyed." 70

Nevertheless, many troops still believed in Johnston and saw the campaign from an optimistic perspective. James Brannock admitted, "we still believe that he knows what he is doing—that though his present movements are very much against him apparently, they are strategic." Brannock reasoned, "at the right time & place he will strike the enemy a blow from which they cannot recover." J. P. Cannon’s assessment of morale was strikingly similar. "Usually an army becomes demoralized when it has to fall back continually," he argued, "but we have enough confidence in our commander to believe that when the opportunity comes he will strike the enemy a blow which will stop his aggressive movements." Atlanta newspapers still concurred that Johnston was luring the enemy into a trap. A rumor even circulated through camp that Johnston retreated "in obedience to a positive order from Richmond, ordering him not to bring on an engagement for four days," presumably because reinforcements were on the way. 71

Fighting on the defensive also gave Rebels the impression that they were severely punishing the enemy. This conviction is curious, however, because both sides’ casualties for the Georgia campaign were about equal—Johnston’s men were not inflicting the 2:1 losses on the enemy that Lee’s troops were achieving in Virginia. In fact, up to the final week in May, Sherman’s losses were less than Johnston’s. Nevertheless, Samuel Foster pronounced the fight at Adairsville “all one sided, that is we kill them and they can’t hurt us.” Likewise, Thomas Hampton estimated Union casualties at 7,000 and Confederate losses at 3,000, when both forces had lost about 4,000 men to that point. "I do not think that either [figure] is fair wrong," he told his wife. James Hall concluded that “so far we have everything to encourage us. Our loss has been slight while that of the enemy must have been very heavy since General Johnston has compelled them to attack our breastworks in almost every instance.” J. P. Cannon believed the Rebels “have inflicted a
loss of at least three to one, but Sherman, having such a large force, can flank and compel us to fall back when it suits him.” He figured that the coming battles, even if they were not large, would “reduce his strength before reaching Atlanta, so we can give him battle with something near an equal force. If we can do this we feel sure of a great victory.”

Perhaps some Rebels assumed they were beating the enemy in each engagement in order to compensate for the ignominy of retreat. This could explain George Binford’s curious assessment, “in every charge we slayed them with but little loss on the whole retreat.” Similarly, James Brannock admitted that throughout the retreat, “we have the consolation of knowing that, all this time, the enemy are suffering worse than we are.” More than any physical evidence, the Rebels’ psychological need to sustain morale encouraged the opinion that Sherman’s army was in terrible condition.

Many soldiers felt their tactical advantage of being on the defensive would pay off whenever the great battle did occur, so they remained confident and patient of success. Some troops even disparaged the enemy for flanking instead of fighting. As John Cotton put it, “we will whip them yet as soon as we can get them to fite us.” Grant Taylor agreed, “the Yanks have flanked us and caused us to fall back. We invariably repulse them when they attack us. But they wo’nt come up and give us a general battle. If they would I believe we could whip them. The army is in fine spirits and have full confidence in themselves if we could have a fair fight.” William Nugent also wrote home that “our men look upon success as certain whenever we get old Sherman to fight us squarely and quit his everlasting flanking.” He then repeated a phrase that was becoming a mantra, “we have . . . been successful losing few men and inflicting heavy damage upon the enemy.” According to Nugent, “whole corps have charged Divisions of our army and have always been repulsed with great loss.” Frank Batchelor concurred that Sherman “gets worsted every time he-assaults our breastworks, and seems afraid to open the big fight.” Instead of admitting Sherman’s success at penetrating into enemy territory without fighting a major battle, Rebels like Cotton, Taylor, Nugent, and Batchelor deemed the
bluecoats’ maneuvering a sign of Yankee cowardice or trickery. More importantly, they convinced themselves that Sherman’s movements were only postponing his inevitable destruction. A vignette from later in the Atlanta campaign illustrates Rebel confidence. On July 5 Sherman rode with his advanced column as they chased the retreating Confederates. By the side of the road stood a house on which the Rebels had written: “You cant wip Johnson’s army you yankey dogs; if you don’t believe it try us in an open field fight.” The Federals were within sight of Atlanta.\textsuperscript{74}

In late May Sherman flanked the Confederate line again at Allatoona by leaving the railroad and heading due south. When the Federals converged on a crossroads at Dallas, they were twenty miles past the Confederate rear and almost as close to Atlanta. Cavalry alerted Johnston of this maneuver, and the Rebels used interior lines to swing between Sherman and the city. On May 25–27 the armies clashed near a Methodist church named New Hope. As a colossal thunderstorm drenched the combatants and added to the din of battle, three Union divisions broke against one Rebel division. Surgeon J. P. Cannon shared the enthusiasm of many comrades when he commented that it looked “like we are to make a stand at last.”\textsuperscript{75}

Just as the ebb and flow of contests in Virginia deceived Lee’s men into thinking they had driven the foe for miles, shifting lines and ultimate control of the field at New Hope Church encouraged Johnston’s troops. Benjamin Seaton reported, “we charged the Yankees and they run in ever direction.” John Cotton agreed, stating “our men whiped the yankeys very bad and tuck about 300 prisoners.” Samuel Foster recalled, “as soon as they broke to run we commenced to take prisoners. We were going down hill, still Yelling like all the devils from the lower regions had been turned loose, and occasionally a tree lying on the ground would have from 5 to 20 Yanks lying down behind the log.” A colonel told Foster “that we killed 703 dead on the ground and captured 350 prisoners.” Foster counted, “50 dead men in a circle of 30 ft.” He was so elated with the flush of
victory that he pronounced; "the dead are strewn thicker on the ground than at any battle of the war." 76

But New Hope Church did not develop into the climactic contest for Atlanta. Both commanders refused to commit all their troops to the fray, and the armies slowly sidled east along the railroad. As weeks wore by, it appeared that Johnston's strategy (and red-clay roads that had turned to mud in recent rainstorms) had finally halted the enemy's sweeping advances. When May came to a close, both sides approached Marietta, Georgia, and the Confederates built formidable defenses that stopped Sherman dead in his tracks. The Federals had lost about 9,300 men during the month and the Confederates roughly 8,500. 77

Despite their close proximity to Atlanta, the Unionists had reasons for concern. Distance and time worked in Johnston's favor. Every mile farther into Georgia stretched the bluecoats' supply line and required more men to guard it. In other words, as they approached their goal, Federal forces diminished their numerical advantage in order to secure their rear. Likewise, the longer the campaign continued, the more likely it was that Johnston's cavalry would find a place to cut Sherman's life line. Worse still, Nathan Bedford Forrest was loose in Tennessee. On April 12 Forrest's horsemen sacked Fort Pillow and murdered its black defenders. Two months later, they met 8,000 Union cavalrymen (almost twice Forrest's numbers) at Brice's Crossroads and trounced them. Sherman was so agitated about Forrest's activities that he ordered Union horse soldiers to "follow Forrest to the death, if it cost 10,000 lives and breaks the Treasury. There never will be peace in Tennessee till Forrest is dead." To compound Sherman's gloom and anxiety, June began with seventeen days of rain. The deluge hampered supply lines, dispirited the men, and seemed most beneficial to the Rebels and Georgia's teeming mosquitoes. 78

In June, Sherman was as hampered against Johnston as Grant was against Lee. In both cases, massive Federal armies were within reach of their objectives but could not
break through or circumvent smaller armies filled with veterans. Chafing for an opportunity to smash the Confederates and seize Atlanta, Sherman ordered the type of assault Johnston had been goading him to do throughout the campaign. On June 27 Union divisions funneled into a devastating field of fire on Kennesaw Mountain. Using the terrain for defense as they had since Dalton, the gray-coats unleashed enfilading volleys and close-range artillery fire upon their exposed assailants. When Sherman realized his mistake and called off the fight that afternoon, he had lost 3,000 men while the Confederates suffered fewer than 600 casualties.

Rebels considered Kennesaw Mountain proof that they could and would crush the Federals whenever they fought them directly. Moreover, the battle encouraged Confederates to magnify their estimates of Federal casualties. The day before the contest, the Rebels read newspapers that assessed Sherman’s casualties for the campaign at 30,000 men (the actual number was closer to 17,000). After Kennesaw Mountain, John Cotton claimed “from there own accounts we have killed and wounded betwixt 50 and 75 thousand of there men” since Dalton. General Johnston shared this appraisal. He guessed that Confederate casualties (excluding the cavalry) numbered almost 10,000 and presumed the enemy losses were “six times as great.” James Brannock figured “Sherman has lost at least 30 or 40,000 men while we have not lost one fourth that number.” Many Confederates wrote how impressed they were with the one-sided results at Kennesaw Mountain. James Hall told his parents that when the battle ceased, his breastworks “in some places seemed almost covered with” dead Yankees. He reported that no one was hurt in his company, and only two men were wounded in the entire regiment. Another Rebel described how concealed Johnston’s position was: “we could see into the United States, while the Confederacy was utter darkness to them.” J. P. Cannon read a telegraph that appraised the Federal loss at 8,000 to 10,000. “A few more engagements like that will reduce Sherman’s force so he will not have so many to send around our flanks,” Cannon remarked.
Kennesaw Mountain also confirmed many Rebels' faith in Johnston and his strategy. Frank Batchelor summed up the army's situation three days after the battle: "our Army is large, in good spirits, have all confidence in Genl Johnston, and looking to the God of battles feel assured of victory." Grant Taylor's appraisal was strikingly similar: "we are strongly fortified here and if the Yanks would attack us I believe with God's help we would dress them out nicely." William Nugent agreed that "the soldiers are all in fine spirits and tho' greatly outnumbered will give Mr. Sherman a sound drubbing at the proper time." General Ross told his wife, "Sherman's forces are in 11 miles of Atlanta. Yet all [of us] are sanguine 'Mars Joe' knows what he is about." J. P. Cannon boasted to himself, "although still largely out-numbered, we hope to be successful and drive Sherman and his hosts back to the Tennessee River." James Brannock's perceptions on the subject brimmed with illogic:

Johnston has tried every way to get [Sherman] to fight a decisive battle but he will not do it. In the meantime Johnston is drawing him farther & farther, & when the proper time arrives will no doubt crush his army completely. We may possibly even give up Atlanta, but it will be for a motive. Don't you have any fears. Genl Johnston's all right, & the army is all right—You never saw troops in such spirits in your life, & their confidence in Johnston is unbounded. Rest assured that when this campaign winds up all will be well.

For Brannock and others, including General Johnston, strict military concerns trumped all other considerations. As long as the army avoided destruction and frustrated the enemy's advance, it hardly mattered how much territory the Rebels surrendered. In the end, these diehards would sooner give up Atlanta and preserve the army than wreak themselves against Sherman's enormous force in an attempt to save the city. They sustained hope that their conserved legions would somehow, sometime, somewhere catch the enemy making a mistake and ruin him. This Fabian perspective ignored signs of defeat that surrounded the Confederates. Charred fields were not portents of failure but necessary
losses that robbed the enemy of supplies. Ruined railroads and burned bridges were not Confederate misfortunes but impediments to the enemy’s progress. Retreating was not an admittance of defeat but rather a cagey elusiveness that permitted the army to fight another day. 81

But not all Johnston’s men shared this rosy outlook. Benjamin Seaton was tired of retreating. Within two miles of Atlanta, Seaton wrote, “it seams we have gone as far as we ought to go unless we intend to give up all of our country and not fight anymore and that is not the idey—it is victory or death.” Hiram Williams agreed and asked, “will this falling back never come to an end?” While some of his comrades disregarded Atlanta’s fate, James Bates wrote home, “I am very much afraid Atlanta will fall into the hands of the enemy, & it will be a most serious loss to the Confederacy—both on account of the rail road & the extensive manufactories here.” Grant Taylor also thought Atlanta would soon fall into enemy hands because of Sherman’s superior numbers. Many men registered their disgust and despair by deserting. Thomas Hampton was shocked to discover that some of his brigade’s deserters were from his home county. 82

Johnston’s constant retreating annoyed no other man as much as it did Jefferson Davis. When a message from Johnston implied that the Army of Tennessee would abandon Atlanta without a fight, Davis removed the general on July 17 and appointed John Bell Hood to the command. The news sent shock waves through the army. Like Federal troops’ affection for George McClellan, Confederates loved Johnston because he put their comfort and safety first. Samuel Foster concluded that Johnston “has so endeared himself to his soldiers, that no man can take his place.” According to Foster, “we have never made a fight under him that we did not get the best of it.” Foster went on to stress Johnston’s care for the men: “He never deceived us once. It is true we have had hard fighting and hard marching, but we always had something to eat, and in bad weather, or after an extra hard march we would always have a little whiskey issued.” Foster was impressed that Johnston “was always looking after our comfort and safety. He
would investigate our breastworks in person, make suggestions as to any little addition or improvement that would make them safer or more comfortable.” William Nugent also thought the Army had succeeded under Johnston’s leadership. In his mind, they had whipped the enemy in every engagement, had been well fed and clothed, had never been led to slaughter, and had always inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy at little cost to the Rebel ranks. Moreover, “everthing [sic] moved like clockwork” under Johnston’s guidance. “Every officer knew his place; every Regiment, Brigade, Division, and Corps knew when to move when to halt, how to move when and where to form. There was no jostling, no commingling of troops, no hurrying causelessly, and no difficulty arising from the blocking of roads. . . . our communications were not interrupted, our transportation remained intact, our artillery horses were in good condition.” For Nugent, these elements outweighed the endless backpedaling toward Atlanta.83

Whether they supported Johnston or not, many troops expected results from Hood’s appointment because the young general was a fighter. After months of weary marching and digging, Rebels anticipated the decisive battle for Atlanta. James Bates forecasted, “if we win this fight here and Lee in Va. is successful I believe we will have peace in six months but if we fail in this summer campaign the war in my opinion will be protracted indefinitely.” “Remember this & see if I am not a prophet for once,” Bates told his sister. Thomas Hampton agreed that “there will be Stirng times in this department soon” because of Hood’s leadership. “I expect a general engagement will come off in a few days and . . . I hope it will be favourable to us as a disaster at this point & time would be ruinous,” Hampton remarked. James Brannock predicted, “the next ten or twelve days will decide the contest for Atlanta. . . . [and] most military men think that Sherman’s campaign will end in disaster.”84

Within a day of taking command, Hood fulfilled expectations by assaulting one of Sherman’s three columns as it encircled the city. The attack was a disastrous failure and the costliest engagement of the campaign for the Rebels to date. Two days later, Hood
struck again with General Hardee’s corps at Jonesboro. This time the Confederates suffered half as many casualties as they had lost in ten weeks under Johnston. Unsatisfied, Hood charged again on July 28 and bloodied his ranks for no strategic gain. In eight days, the young commander cost his army 15,000 casualties while inflicting only 6,000 upon Sherman’s troops.\textsuperscript{85}

Despite disastrous results, the troops’ perceptions of these battles varied from disgust to elation. Some men understood that Hood’s aggressive tactics would bleed the army to death. Hiram Williams observed, “Hood will soon ruin his army at this rate. It will not do for the weaker army to charge the stronger.” William Nugent thought his new general “has so far done very well and gives evidence of some ability—but at what fearful cost. We have lost about 8,000 killed and wounded in the last two or three days. This sort of fighting . . . will dissipate our army very soon.” Despite the heavy losses, Nugent assumed, “we have inflicted more than a corresponding and relative damage on the enemy.” Moreover, his account of the fight on July 22 spun the defeat into a triumph: “we charged the flank of the Yankee Army protected by huge breastworks, drove it back for two miles, captured 1,800 prisoners, buried about 2,000 of their dead, and wounded large numbers of them. Our loss about 3,000.” As had happened in countless previous battles, the Rebel combatants found ways to claim victory.\textsuperscript{86}

Many Rebels praised Hood’s leadership. James Brannock considered Hood’s assaults “successful” and inspiring to the men. “We have captured, according to the latest estimates, about 4700 prisoners & upwards of 30 pieces of artillery.” He claimed that Hardee’s corps “attacked the enemy . . . completely routing them & driving them from their entrenchments with great slaughter.” Though Brannock admitted that a few more such offensives would wipe out his division, he announced that the battles had “almost entirely done away with the dissatisfaction of the army at the removal of Genl Johnston.” Thomas Hampton also applauded Hood’s leadership throughout the punishing engagements. He concluded that the enemy “have been badly cut up on both wings since
Hood has had command,” and expected Sherman “will be turned back at this place as we are receiving additions evry day & our men are quite buoyant although there are a great many of our men dropping [sic] into the hands of the Enemy & running away.” Within weeks, Hampton assumed that “Gen Hood has checked the forward movements of the Enemy & if the Enemy does not look sharp [Hood] will give him a complete Flogging as the Troops are confident & determined.” Benjamin Seaton even believed “the enemy loss is vary heavy and ours is quite small to theirs.”

After the Confederate offensives, both sides settled down to a siege in which neither army gained an advantage for a month. Union probes failed to break the defenses and Rebel cavalry failed to sever the enemy’s supply line. Nevertheless, rumors circulated through the gray ranks that their horse soldiers were loosening Sherman’s grip on Atlanta by raiding his rear. According to Samuel Vann, “General Anderson came around yesterday and told us . . . if we could hold our ground a few days longer at this place that the victory was assuredly ours, for General Wheeler had gone around in their rear and torn up the railroad, and if they can not flank us and cause us to retreat, that they will necessarily be compelled to charge us, or retreat toward Chattanooga, or be compelled to starve to death.” “I think they will retreat,” Vann concluded. John Doyle also heard that Wheeler was wreaking Sherman’s rear. Though Doyle admitted, “Sherman is still in our front with a very big army,” the Rebel “believed that Sherman will have to fight in a few days, or commence retreating as his communications are cut off.” “I hope he will do one or the other,” Doyle confided, “and should he attack us, I believe God will give us a glorious victory.”

When most of Sherman’s army left their trenches on August 25–26, Hood and his men supposed that the bluecoats were finally retreating. Rebels and Atlantans rejoiced and claimed victory for four days while Sherman’s columns slid south to cut Hood’s last supply line. On August 30 the Rebel commander discovered his adversary’s intentions and sent two corps to intercept the Federals. It was too late. The Union army crushed
these corps and launched a powerful counterattack. Facing annihilation or surrender if they remained in town, the Confederates evacuated the city to save the remains of their army. Atlanta, a symbol of Confederate tenacity second only to Richmond, now belonged to the enemy.89

Soldiers who had praised Hood days earlier now blamed him for the disaster. William Nugent voiced a popular verdict, “Sherman completely out-generated Hood.” Samuel Foster bitterly remarked that Hood “has virtually murdered near 10,000 men around Atlanta trying to do what Joe Johnston said could not be done.” General Ross noted, “the troops are much dejected and abuse Genl Hood. . . . They all call loudly for the Old hero Genl Johnston.” After defeat, Johnston’s leadership seemed even more valuable. Troops seldom mentioned that the fall of Atlanta would have been the logical outcome of Johnston’s chronic retreating. Instead, men focused on Hood’s high casualties, even though many Rebels had downplayed those losses before Atlanta fell. “When Johnston left this Army,” Ross commented, “it was the finest and best army I Ever heard of to the number, but now it is hacked and the men will not charge Breastworks, and is 20,000 men weaker now than when he left.” Hiram Smith’s diary entry for the day Atlanta was lost exudes with depression: “The great struggle is over. Atlanta is being incinerated. Our Corps was put in motion this morning. . . . The troops are already demoralized and such straggling I never saw before.” In contrast, Lafayette Orr seemed relieved that the tension of the siege and the hard campaign was lifted. “I am happy to say this campaign is over. The Yanks has got Atlanta at last, though it costed them many a man. . . . We are gone into the regular camps, and I am so glad I don’t know what to do.”90

Many Rebels found ways to downplay the implications of their failure. Some looked for alternative routes to independence that did not rely solely on military results. William Nugent reasoned, “if we can hold Richmond and keep Sherman back our cause is not yet lost by any means.” Nevertheless he admitted, “the country is literally eaten
out,” and “I hope everything from the Democratic party North. . . . [and] for a change in rulers.” James Brannock also focused on the presidential election, but he favored Lincoln. He conjectured, “if Lincoln be elected it will probably be the cause of revolution in the North and Western states & will end in securing our independence.” More significantly, Brannock and others assumed the loss of Atlanta prolonged the war but did not alter its eventual outcome, Confederate victory. He wrote his wife,

I suppose you all have the “Blues” over the fall of Atlanta. Well, we had them too, at first, dreadfully, but we are beginning to “cheer up” again. It is useless to deny that it is a sever blow to us, but it is by no means fatal to our cause & should not make us despond for a moment. We have only to go to work with renewed energy & determination to recover from its disastrous consequences. Tis true, it is rather hard upon us to have to wake up so suddenly from our sweet dream of a speedy peace which seemed almost within our grasp, to the stern & dread reality of two or perhaps four more years of War. But so it is & grieving over it don’t help the matter a particle. We can only devote ourselves afresh to our cause & go forward with a firm reliance upon Providence. . . . If we could have held Atlanta, we would in all human probability have had peace by Spring—as it is we can form no idea when we shall be able to achieve that glorious result, but come it must & will, sooner or later & our independence with it.

After repeating this reasoning for pages in order to convince his wife (and himself) that all would be well, Brannock interjected a telling remark, “it is useless to talk about this any more. I wish I could not even think about it any more.” Brannock used reasoning and denial to squelch his doubts. James Bates evaded the costs of Atlanta’s loss by underrating the importance of the city: “the only serious inconvenience resulting from its fall is the loss of the principal Rail road leading to Richmond.” Moreover, Bates did “not think Sherman will be able to hold Atlanta,” because his supply line, “which is nearly 400 miles in length” should be easily cut. Even though the Rebels had been abandoning territory from the start of the campaign, Samuel Foster somehow considered Atlanta “the
first piece of public property” the enemy had captured all summer. Rebels’ ability to minimize the significance of a city they had spent months sacrificing their lives for shows how pliant their perceptions could be.91

President Davis encouraged this agile optimism during a visit to the army after Atlanta’s fall. Fearing that Sherman’s success would wither Rebel resolve, the president swooped through the Carolinas and Georgia on a speaking tour. Certain that “nothing has changed in the purpose of [the Confederate] Government, in the indomitable valor of its troops, or in the unquenchable spirit of its people,” Davis envisioned victorious scenarios that outdid those created by the troops. Though Sherman commanded a massive army flushed with success, Davis predicted, “I see no chance for Sherman to escape from a defeat or a disgraceful retreat.” “The fate that befell the army of the French Empire in its retreat from Moscow will be re-enacted. Our cavalry and our people will harass and destroy his army, as did the Cossacks that of Napoleon, and the Yankee general, like him, will escape with only a bodyguard.” Furthermore, Davis charged, “we must march into Tennessee” where “we will draw from twenty thousand to thirty thousand to our standard, and . . . push the enemy back to the banks of the Ohio and thus give the peace party of the North an accretion no puny editorial can give.”92

General Hood’s plans after the loss of Atlanta matched Davis’s visions of glory. The army’s operations in the fall and winter of 1864 were so outlandish that James McPherson has described them as “scripted in never-never land.” When the Army of Tennessee, still 40,000 strong, failed to sever the Sherman’s supply line, they turned their backs on the superior Federal force and headed for Alabama and Tennessee. Leaving all of Georgia to Sherman’s columns, Hood marched towards General George Thomas’s 60,000 bluecoats with the intention of crushing them and liberating Tennessee. Hood hoped to reach Kentucky eventually, acquire 20,000 recruits there, and turn east to join Lee’s army. Then he expected the combined Confederate legions would finish off Grant and Sherman.93
Returning to their beloved Tennessee colored soldiers’ perceptions of the campaign and boosted their spirits. Some accounts of the operations exhibit so much misinformation and optimism that the march seemed to be an escape from reality as well as a flight from Sherman. Troops in the Army of Tennessee seldom mentioned Sherman’s impressive March to the Sea, because they left Georgia and did not witness, let alone oppose, the Federals’ momentum. John Cotton wrote home that the Rebels “whipped the yankeys where ever we come in contact with them[.] we have torn up a great deal of railroad on our rout.” He was “afraid it hant done much good [because] . . . the yankeys has got atlanta but I here that our men has taken it back.” James Bates considered Hood’s march “one of the boldest movements of the war.” Hood used misinformation and rhetoric to encourage this optimism. On October 2 he had his officers report to the men “that we were going to flank Sherman out of Atlanta, and in maneuvering we might be short of rations occasionally, but he would do his best on that point.” Furthermore, Hood “expected to have some fighting and some hard marching, and wanted an expression of the men upon it.” As Samuel Foster reported, “every man said go.” Days later while on the march, Hood reported to a passing column that “the Yanks were leaving Atlanta in a great hurry.” Foster rejoiced, “this army has done wonders! Flanked the Yanks out of Atlanta without firing a gun.”

A number of other elements bolstered Rebel morale during the campaign. Marching north without resistance was a welcome change after months of retreating south under constant enemy pressure. As Lafayette Orr put it, “marchen is pretty hard, but I had reather march than fight.” The troops also felt successful by “capturing” towns they had abandoned to the foe months ago. When the Rebels reacquired Dalton, James Brannock counted 1100 prisoners, piles of commissary, quartermasters, and medical stores, and miles of wrecked railroad. Samuel Foster also claimed Calhoun, Resaca, and Tunnel Hill as towns the Confederates had seized. The men also enjoyed tearing up the rail line. Foster said the troops “are just making a frolic of it.” Though skeptical of the
campaign at its start, Foster was beginning “to think that Jeff Davis and Hood made a ten
strike, when they plan[n]ed this thing. It beats fighting.” He was convinced that they had
torn enough railroad to sever Sherman’s supplies. “Their only chance now to live,” he
conjectured about the Union army, “is to disband and scatter over the country, and make
their way back north as best they can.”

In November when the Rebel army met and propelled advanced components of
Thomas’s force, Confederates misperceived that they were overpowering the foe.
William Nugent told his wife, “Hood is pushing Thomas who is calling vainly for
reinforcements. The prospects are we will soon have Nashville and that the Yankees will
be driven into Kentucky, and possibly beyond.” As the Rebels headed towards Nashville,
Hood made a promise to them that he would soon break. Regimental commanders called
their men out and told them that Hood would not “risk a chance for a defeat in Tenn.
That he will not fight in Tenn. unless he has an equal number of men and choice of the
ground.” Samuel Foster thought, “this was very nice talk, for we all felt confident that we
could always whip an equal number of men with the choice of the ground.”

Thomas was pulling back, but his army was winding up for a knockout punch not
retreating. On November 30 the Confederates found General John Schofield’s troops at
Franklin, Tennessee. These Federals had evaded Hood’s army at Spring Hill on the
previous day and would have been across the Harpeth River and on their way to
Nashville had the bridge not needed repairing. While wagons creaked across makeshift
spans, 34,000 bluecoats and over 60 artillery pieces rimmed the town. Schofield thought
the sight of so many defenders entrenched before a two-mile, level plain would halt the
Rebels and buy time to complete the crossing. He was wrong. With only 22,000 troops
within reach of the Union position and only eight cannon, Hood ordered a frontal
assault.

What followed was carnage worse than Grant’s debacle at Cold Harbor. One
scholar has described the battle of Franklin as “the grisliest features of Pickett’s Charge
and Spotsylvania’s Bloody Angle” combined. Over 20,000 men marched across an unobstructed field of fire; 7,000 of them fell as casualties, including twelve generals. The Confederates also lost fifty-four regimental commanders, half of their total. Schofield lost one third the amount of casualties he inflicted on the Rebels and departed during the night for Nashville. The Army of Tennessee had smashed itself beyond recognition.98

But even after a defeat as devastating as this one, many Confederate soldiers claimed victory. Rebels’ positive perceptions of Franklin illustrate the full extent of their ability to find hope and victory in the worst circumstances. Because Schofield’s army left their position during the night, Hood’s men controlled the field of battle and, thus, technically gained a tactical win. Moreover, as on so many previous battlegrounds, the Rebels miscalculated casualty figures or discounted their significance when the toll ran against them. Samuel Vann’s account of the battle was typical:

They were well fortified and we had to charge their works, so we put out through shot and shell, driving them from three lines of breastworks, though many of our gallant men fell on the field. . . . They were lying heaped up all over the battleground. Such a slaughter never was seen before on either side. I counted 30 dead Yanks in a space of ground not larger than a common dwelling house. We lost as many killed as the Yankees but we gained a complete victory, driving them to Nashville.

Lafayette Orr offered a similar account of Franklin: “we have had another big battle in which we whipped the enemy, tho with a grate slaughter on our side. Our loss in killed and wounded was much grater than that of the enemy. Our brigade lossed 400 killed and wounded. . . . We completely suprised them and drove them to Nashville. . . . Our Brigade only numbers twenty five men.” Benjamin Seaton also called Franklin a triumph even though “hour loss is nearly or quite as much as that of the enemy.” In his study of the Army of Tennessee, Larry Daniel identified this unconquerable mentality. “Historians, of course, consider Franklin a staggering defeat for the Rebels,” Daniel argues, but “the
point is that many Southerners believed it to be otherwise." Daniel correctly understood that "the perception of battlefield victories motivated many men to fight on."99

This conviction of being unconquerable (and Hood’s stubbornness) compelled the army to bury its dead and march for Nashville. After being pummeled by Schofield’s 34,000 troops, the Confederates followed their opponents to the city where Thomas had another 30,000 men behind defenses as formidable as those at Richmond and Washington. Upon reaching the outskirts of the Tennessee capital, even Hood knew his 25,000 soldiers could not take such a position guarded by a force over twice their size. Instead of pulling away to recuperate or crossing the Cumberland River in an attempt to outflank the superior Union army, Hood entrenched his men within sight of the Federal works and waited for an attack. The Confederate line only covered four of eight roads that radiated south of Nashville.100

On December 15 as a fog curtain lifted over the scene, 50,000 Union men rushed down the four, unguarded turnpikes and into Hood’s right and left flanks. The Rebels withstood massive assaults until darkness halted the fight and then retreated to a stronger, more compact position that covered only two of the eight routes heading south. The next day, Hood’s depleted ranks repulsed powerful blows for hours but finally crumpled and fled in chaos. "Such a stampede you never heard of," Lafayette Orr wrote his brother. "Men threw away there guns and evry fellow for his self. The officers tried to rally ther men several different times but could not do any thing with them."101

In two days outside Nashville, the Federals had completed the annihilation they started at Franklin. Thomas inflicted 6,000 casualties on the Rebels, including over 4,000 prisoners, while suffering 3,000 losses. He also netted 53 artillery pieces, the highest number claimed in a contest by either side during the war. Contemporary Confederate accounts of the rout at Nashville are rare because the men spent two weeks running for their lives. The rear guard action of Forrest’s cavalry and luck saved thousands of Rebels from being captured during the Christmas of 1864. When the remains of Hood’s army
reorganized at Tupelo, Mississippi, at the beginning of 1865, they numbered only half of
the 40,000 who had entered Tennessee seven weeks ago. Hood resigned on January 13.102

Despite its terrible campaign, the army reorganized in 1865 and turned east to
face Sherman once again. With Johnston returning to command, the Confederacy’s
western army chased the Federals across the Carolinas and challenged an isolated column
of bluecoats at Bentonville, North Carolina, in March. As usual, some Rebels claimed a
victory on tactical grounds. When news of Lee’s surrender reached them, Johnston’s
troops hoped to bolster their ranks with men who refused to quit at Appomattox Court
House. For weeks, Lee’s veterans, refugees, cabinet members, and even Jefferson Davis,
passed through their camps. These men who had been losing battles since 1862 were still
fighting while the remains of their government and its most revered army swept by like
debris in a flood. There was no more Confederacy when they surrendered.

**Conclusion: The Products of (Mis)Perceptions.**

If Clausewitz’s concept of “true military spirit” clarifies how Rebel legions not
only maintained cohesion but sustained hope during the grueling campaigns of 1864, his
total war theory specifies how the Federals ultimately crushed that spirit. Though neither
man read the Prussian’s book, Grant and Sherman sought Clausewitz’s three objectives
of “absolute” or total war: destroy the enemy’s army, occupy his territory, and break the
will of his people. The fortitude of Lee and Johnston’s ranks insured that the Federals’
first goal was the last one they achieved. Throughout the final campaigns, Union forces
seized their opponents’ cities, destroyed their supplies, controlled their transportation
networks, freed their slaves, and sapped civilians’ ability and will to protract the contest.
But in the end, remnants of Confederate armies still roamed the wasted, southern
landscape in defiance of Federal authority. As one Confederate officer expressed the
situation in January 1865, “the people in parts of Georgia, Alabama & the Carolinas are
ready to submit; but the real country is the army—it... [is] unconquered and
unconquerable.” Destroying veteran armies was no simple task, and the Rebellion had two of them. Thousands within the ranks deserted before the war ended, but the dichards—men who possessed the unconquerable mentality—fought until northern determination and manpower obliterated what these last Confederates could muster with military spirit and experience.103

But another, less heroic factor animated the last Confederates as well. Skewed perceptions and misjudgments of their immediate circumstances influenced how the soldiers comprehended their ordeal. With a mixture of bewilderment and respect for Rebel tenacity, General John Schofield related an experience that exhibits Confederates’ distorted perspectives. As waves of Union troops overwhelmed Hood’s ranks at Nashville on December 16, Schofield conversed with a captured Rebel field officer. The exchange still perplexed the general thirty-two years later:

> In answer to my question as to when the Confederate troops recognized the fact that they were beaten, he answered, “Not till you routed us just now.” I did not believe him then, for I thought they must have recognized their defeat at Franklin, or at least on the 15th, at Nashville. But now I think he probably told me the exact truth. I doubt if any soldiers in the world ever needed so much cumulative evidence to convince them that they were beaten.

By trusting their comrades and generals, miscalculating casualties, claiming victory in defeat, and otherwise magnifying their chances for success, thousands of Confederates convinced themselves that the war was still winnable in 1864–1865.104
1 John M. Schofield, *Forty-Six Years in the Army* (New York, 1897), 248.


5 For more on bird’s eye and worm’s eye views of warfare, see Fred Anderson, *A People’s Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years’ War* (Chapel Hill and London, 1984), 142–64.

6 Ever since Hannibal’s Carthaginians smashed a Roman army at the battle of Cannae in 212 B.C., it has been a benchmark for the decisive battle. For more on how the concept of decisive battles first developed, see Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (New York, 1989). Charles Royster identified the prevalence of faith in a climactic battle during the Civil War: “throughout the war Americans persisted in expecting one climactic battle that would decide the outcome and end the fighting... In the last grand battle, they believed, the scale of effort would be so great, the killing so horrible, and the result so clear that the losers would concede defeat in the war, no matter what their remaining resources.” See Royster, *Destructive War*, 254.

7 In Civil War historiography, Confederate deserters are not renegades or cowards, but clear-eyed, common folk who left a failing government and a terrible war in favor of their families and peace. This portrait not only acquits deserters for leaving their comrades but also implies that their individual acts, when multiplied by thousands, helped to defeat a cause that is condemned (and rightly so) by almost every one today. My aim is not to valorize the men who persevered but to explain how their (mis)perceptions of the war encouraged them to further resistance and even provided some troops with hope of victory.

of rations fluctuated throughout the war. Bell Wiley explained, "the continually dwindling ration of soldiers from early months of the war til the closing campaigns of 1865 was all the more tragic in view of the fruitfulness of Confederate fields. . . . The failure. . . was not one of production but of distribution." He blamed many factors, including government inefficiency, poor transportation networks, inflation, and Federal control of the Mississippi River. See Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Baton Rouge and London, 1943), 90-107, (quotation, p. 96). For the Army of Northern Virginia, see J. Tracy Power, *Lee's Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox* (Chapel Hill and London, 1998), 124–25, 224–24, 257–60. For the Army of Tennessee, see Larry J. Daniel, *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in a Confederate Army* (Chapel Hill and London, 1991), 51–63. Horses and mules suffered worse than the soldiers did. See John Trevillian to Roberta Trevillian, 23 July 1864, England Family Papers, VHS; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 8, 17 September 1864, 8, 10, 11 January 1865, VHS.

9Junius Newport Bragg to Anna Josephine (Goddard) Bragg, 20 September 1864, in Mrs. T. J. Gaugham, ed., *Letters of a Confederate Surgeon, 1861-65* (Camden, Ark. 1960), 249; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 1 December 1864 (second through fourth quotations), 31 December 1864 (fifth quotation), 2 January 1865 (sixth quotation), VHS. Rueben Pierson to William H. Pierson, 15 January 1864, in Thomas W. Cutrer and T. Michael Parrish, eds., *Brothers in Gray: The Civil War Letters of the Pierson Family* (Baton Rouge and London, 1997), 224 (emphasis added). Hardships could strengthen or erode comradeship. When rations were low in May 1864 and Hiram Williams "had two large crackers left," he divided his food with a messmate who had nothing. "I cannot bear to see any of my friends with nothing to eat as long as I have any," Williams wrote in his diary. Williams's generosity backfired, however, because he was without food the following day and could find no one willing to share their scant amounts of cornmeal. "It was the first time I had ever asked for anything to eat," he exclaimed, "and it will be the last." See, Hiram Smith Williams Diary, 19, 20 May 1864, in Lewis N. Wynne and Robert A. Taylor, eds., *This War So Horrible: The Civil War Diary of Hiram Smith Williams* (Tuscaloosa, Ala. and London, 1993), 75, 77.

10Creed Thomas Davis diary, 2 January 1865, 1 December 1864, VHS; Frank Adams to parents, 19 January 1865, Israel Adams and Family Papers, LSU; Charles Blackford to Susan Blackford, 24 January 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., *Letters from Lee's Army*, 234 (emphasis added); James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 21 October 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; Charles Andry to Mother, 21 September 1864, Michel Thomassin Andry and Family Papers, LSU (emphasis added). Not all soldiers accepted poor rations quietly. On March 21 1864 troops at Bristol, Tennessee, demanded more food and were given an extra day's rations. This only pacified them for a week, however, and on 2 April 1864, a party charged the Commissary, killing a lieutenant and wounding several others. See, William Montgomery diary, 22 March, 3 April 1864, in George F. Montgomery, Jr., ed., *Georgia Sharpshooter: The Civil War Diary and Letters of William Rhadamantus Montgomery, 1839-1906* (Macon, 1997), 45, 47; Milton Barrett to siblings, 1 April 1864, in J. Roderick Heller III
and Carolynn Ayers Heller, eds., *The Confederacy Is on Her Way Up the Spout: Letters to South Carolina, 1861-1864* (Athens and London, 1992), 115–16. Scholars have identified these gender ideals and the pressures they cause in other wars. In their extensive study of American soldiers in World War II, Samuel A. Stouffer and colleagues noted, "the code of masculinity . . . attached value and prestige to enduring danger and hardship, while the general orientation of social values toward the aim of fighting the war lent prestige to the persons most directly concerned with this aim." See Stouffer, et. al., *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, v. 2 (Princeton, 1949), 308.


13Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence, 1997), 65; Grant quoted in James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, 1988), 731. Earl Hess identified the rationale behind continuous campaigning: "During the first three years of the war, operations had centered on the pitched battle, a distinct engagement lasting from a few hours to a few days, each engagement separated by weeks if not months of preparation, maneuvering, and idleness. . . . [Moreover,] nearly all field armies entered winter camps rather than exhaust themselves by struggling over mud-engulfed roads. In Europe, where geographic distances were shorter and improved road systems offered armies a greater opportunity to achieve strategic gains in a shorter time, seasonal campaigning did not unnecessarily prolong conflicts. But in America, with its dirt roads and great geographic expanses, seasonal campaigning prolonged the fighting and loss of life." See, Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence, 1997), 64–65.
14 Charles DeNoon to parents, 28 May 1864, in Richard T. Couture, ed., Charlie's Letters: The Correspondence of Charles E. DeNoon (privately published, no place given, 1982), 222; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 4 June 1864, VHS; Samuel McKittrick to Mary Stennis McKittrick, 5 June 1864, in Donald W. Lewis, “A Confederate Officer's Letters on Sherman's March to Atlanta” Georgia Historical Quarterly 51 (December 1967), 493–94; Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 22 June 1864, Paul Higginbotham Letters, VHS.

15 Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 26 June 1864, 10 August 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT; Hiram Williams diary, 13 November 1864, in Wynne and Taylor, eds., This War So Horrible, 121; Lawrence Ross to Lizzie Ross, 7 July 1864, in Perry Wayne Shelton and Shelly Morrison, eds., Personal Civil War Letters of General Lawrence Sullivan Ross; With Other Letters (Austin, 1994 ), 64; McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 734; Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command, III, Gettysburg to Appomattox (New York, 1944), 676–677.


17 Hiram Smith Williams diary, 20 February 1864, in Wynne and Taylor, eds., This War So Horrible, 26–27; Spencer Welch to Cordelia Strother Welch, 7 May 1864, in Welch, A Confederate Surgeon’s Letters to His Wife, 94–95; Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 16 June 1864, in Blomquist and Taylor, eds., This Cruel War, 259. Footnote: In Georgia throughout the following week, 7–15 May, Grant Taylor’s regiment, the 40th Alabama Infantry, lost ten men killed, thirty-nine wounded, and three missing. “Losing a heap of men” made Taylor “fearful that we will get whipped again.” See Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 17 May 1864, in ibid., 251; Official Records I, 38, Part III, 848–850.


19 Ibid. Berkeley suffered a similar experience in September 1864: “. . . today . . . at my gun, three men, one after the other, were shot down at my right hand. . . . I thought my time would certainly come next.” Henry Berkeley diary, 19 September 1864, in ibid., 98.

20 Henry Berkeley diary, 9 July 1864, in ibid., 86–87; Robert Stiles to mother, 24 July 1864, (first, second, third, and sixth quotations), Stiles to father, 12 September 1864, (fourth and fifth quotations), in Robert Augustus Stiles Papers, VHS.

21 Samuel Vann to Nancy Elizabeth Neel, 25 August 1864, in William Young Elliott, ed., “Most Lovely Lizzie” Love Letters of a Young Confederate Soldier (Birmingham, 1958), 45, 47; Charles DeNoon to parents, 28 May 1864, in Couture, ed., Charlie's Letters, 222; Henry Berkeley diary, 19 September 1864 (first and second and third quotations), 24 September 1864 (fourth quotation), in Runge, ed., Four Years in the Confederate
Artillery, 98, 102. By February 1865, Berkeley’s responsibilities had expanded even further: “I am now doing the duty of a lieutenant, the orderly sergeant, a corporal, and a gunner. Things must be desperate when all these duties have to be performed by one man, and he only a private.” See Berkeley’s 3 February 1865 entry, p. 117. In Georgia, Grant Taylor’s regiment had thirty-four men in three companies by 21 June 1864. See Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 21 June 1864, in Blomquist and Taylor, eds., This Cruel War, 262. Rawleigh Downman’s regiment numbered about one hundred men in January 1865, the others were dead, captured, on horse detail, deserters, or sick in hospitals. Rawleigh Downman to Mary Alice (Macgruder) Downman, 4 January 1865, Downman Family Papers, VHS. For consolidation, see Lafayette Orr to mother, 29 January 1864, in Anderson, ed., Campaigning with Parsons’ Texas Cavalry Brigade, CSA, 127–28; Charles James to Emma James, 9 February 1865, Charles Fenton James Letters, VHS; Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 9 March 1865, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT.

22Spencer Welch to Cordelia Strother Welch, 2 October 1864, in Welch, A Confederate Surgeon’s Letters to His Wife, 107; Johnny Jackman diary, 2, 3, October 1864, in William C. Davis, ed., Diary of a Confederate Soldier: John S. Jackman of the Orphan Brigade (Columbia, 1990), 147. Details of Jackman’s wound are on page 140. It is difficult to estimate how many shirkers filled hospital wards and the rear echelons. Veterans like Jackman probably accused some troops of shirking who had legitimately illnesses or disabilities. Some soldiers expressed concern for the thinning of the ranks. In June 1864, Charles Blackford wrote, “I am very anxious about our lines here. Lee has so few men with which to keep them up that it will be hard to maintain them. He has no mobile reserve to shift about whenever an attack is made. All are in the main line, and that is thin. If these lines are broken Richmond falls, and with the fall of Richmond the war and the Confederacy come to an end.” See, Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 16 June 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., Letters from Lee’s Army, 256. But few soldiers acquired (or at least expressed) Blackford’s objective view of numerical disparities.

23Paul D. Escott, After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism (Baton Rouge, 1978), 150. Escott considers the order “the last resort of a dying government, for after a point the recruitment of troops damaged the productive capacity of the economy, which was equally essential to the war effort. Moreover, many of the steps taken to bolster military strength sapped civilian support by making conditions worse for the common people. Every detailed man whom the government called from his farm into the ranks represented one less man to supply food for hungry soldiers’ families [or for the soldiers themselves].” This perspective is clear from our vantage point and was apparent to thousands of Confederates, but diehard Rebels seldom expressed it, either because they chose to ignore such facts, or because they put the army’s manpower needs above other concerns. Official Records, Ser. IV, Vol. II, 944–52, 1024–49; Spencer Welch to Cordelia Strother Welch, 12 October 1864, in Welch, A Confederate Surgeon’s Letters to His Wife, 108–9. In World War II American soldiers perpetuated the same hierarchy of military matters and combat personnel above civilian and rear echelon support. And it’s worth noting that in World War II many more soldiers
were employed in support groups than in combat units. See Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, v. 2, 290–323.

24 Thomas Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 13 October 1864 (first and second quotations), 16 October 1864 (third quotation), in Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS; Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, 18 October 1864, in Rozier, ed., *Granite Farm Letters*, 206; Creed Davis diary, 21 October 1864, Creed Thomas Davis Diary, VHS.


26 Hiram Williams diary, 24 June 1864 (first quotation), 1 May 1864 (second quotation), 4 April 1864 (third and fourth quotations), in Wynne and Taylor, eds., *This War So Horrible*, 98, 54, 42–44; John Walters diary, 25 December 1864, in Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 181; P. E. Retif to mother, 26 September 1864 (fifth quotation), P. E. Retif Letters, LSU; William Casey to mother, 20 July 1864, William Thomas Casey Papers, VHS; Rawleigh Downman to Mary Alice (Macgruder) Downman, 30 January 1865, Downman Family Papers, VHS. J. Tracy Power is one of many scholars who stresses the connection between deteriorating conditions and Rebels’ will to continue the war. See Power, *Lee’s Miserables*, 302.

27 Charles Blackford to Nannie Blackford, 2 August 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., *Letters from Lee’s Army*, 270; Robert D. Triever to Lizzie Brewer, 14 May 1864, Harman Dinwiddie Papers, VHS; Fred Fleet to Lou, 26 November 1864, in Fleet and Fuller, eds., *Green Mount*, 348; Henry Berkeley diary, 19 September 1864, in Runge, ed., *Four Years in the Confederate Artillery*, 98.

28 Clausewitz, *On War*, 189, 188.

defeated, nothing will be left for us to live for.” Lee quoted in Clifford Dowdey, *Lee’s Last Campaign: The Story of Lee and His Men against Grant—1864* (Boston, 1960), 60. His all-or-nothing attitude appealed to battle-tested and war-weary troops. For a rare example of a Rebel who was not optimistic before the 1864 campaign commenced, see Charles Blackford to Susan Blackford, 1 May 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., *Letters from Lee’s Army*, 242–43.

30 James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 31 January 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS.

31 Historians have not discussed how reviews affected soldiers’ perceptions of their army. Larry Daniel begins his study of the Army of Tennessee with Johnston’s review at Dalton, Georgia, in 1864, but he uses it as a vignette to introduce the army’s men and commanders rather than examining the event’s significance. See Larry J. Daniel, *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in a Confederate Army* (Chapel Hill and London, 1991), 1–10.

32 James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 31 January 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 14 February 1864 (third and fourth quotations), 31 January 1864 (fifth quotation), Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT; Thomas J. Key diary, 19 April 1864, in Cate, ed., *Two Soldiers*, 72; Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 9 March 1864, in Blomquist and Taylor, eds., *This Cruel War*, 230–31; William Montgomery diary, 29 April 1864, in Montgomery, ed., *Georgia Sharpshooter*, 48. Not all soldiers liked reviews, some considered them needless marching. See, Hiram Williams diary, 19 April 1864, in Wynne and Taylor, eds., *This War So Horrible*, 48–49.


34 Power, *Lee’s Miserables*, 2, 3; Robert P. Tutwiler to his aunt, 24 April 1864, quoted in *ibid.*, 2.


39 Power, *Lee’s Miserables*, 20–21; Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 7 May 1864, Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 8 May 1864, VHS.

40 Samuel Finley Harper to his father, 6 May 1864, in Power, *Lee’s Miserables*, 20. On page 24, Power agrees that “on the whole, the officers and men of the army viewed the Wilderness as a resounding Confederate triumph.” James Hays to his mother, 7 May 1864, in *ibid.*; Henry Berkeley diary, 5 May 1864, in Runge, ed., *Four Years in the Confederate Artillery*, 73; Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 5 May 1864 (fifth quotation), 6 May 1864 (sixth and seventh quotations), in Blackford and Blackford, eds., *Letters from Lee’s Army*, 243–44, 244–45; William Montgomery diary, 6 May 1864, in Montgomery, ed., *Georgia Sharpshooter*, 48–49.


46 Spencer Welch to Cordelia Strother Welch, 17 May 1864, in Welch, *A Confederate Surgeon’s Letters to His Wife*, 98; John Walters diary, 10 May 1864, in Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 115–16; Foote, *Civil War* v. 3, 217; Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War*, 112. J. Tracy Power has noted that many Rebels “believed that the battle was an outright victory, won by a combination of Lee’s generalship and their own hard fighting,” but he also provides a wider spectrum of Confederate responses to the contest than I have found. See Power, *Lee’s Miserables*, 29–39 (quotation on p. 35). For short, but telling, diary entries about Spotsylvania, see the William Montgomery diary, 8–18 May 1864, in Montgomery, ed., *Georgia Sharpshooter*, 49–50.


48 “Ham” Chamberlayne to his mother, 15 May 1864, in C. G. Chamberlayne, ed., *Ham Chamberlayne—Virginian; Letters and Papers of an Artillery Officer in the War for*

49John Walters diary, 9 May 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 115; Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 13 May 1864, 20 May 1864, Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS; Robert Trieves to Mrs. Lizzie Brewer, 14 May 1864, Harman Dinwiddie Papers, VHS.

50McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 733.

51Ibid., 733–34, Grant to Halleck quoted in ibid., 735; Foote, Civil War, v. 3, 288; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 1 June 1864, VHS; Edgeworth Bird to Sallie Bird, 1 June 1864, in Rozier, ed., Granite Farm Letters, 169.

52Quotation in Foote, Civil War, v. 3, 288; McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 735; Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants, v. 3, 508.

53Henry Berkeley diary, 3 June 1864, in Runge, ed., Four Years in the Confederate Artillery, 79; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 4 June 1864, 5 June 1864 (quotation), VHS; Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 4 June 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., Letters from Lee’s Army, 250–51; Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 6 June 1864, Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS; John Walters diary, 3 June 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 122.

54McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 739–42. Charles Blackford, for one, expressed concern for the thin ranks defending Petersburg and the capital. On June 9, he thought that “Federal success will not be due to any military skill but natural depletion of our resources, both men and munitions.” And during the following week Blackford noted that Lee had no reserves left: “all are in the main line, and that is thin.” See Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 9 June 1864, 16 June 1864, in Blackford and Blackford, eds., Letters from Lee’s Army, 253, 256.

55McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 743; Power, Lee’s Miserables, 117–18. Power stresses that Confederate assaults in late June and early July “were thwarted by imprecise plans, by a lack of communication and coordination among officers, and by the performance of the troops” (quotation, p. 117). Despite their failings, many Rebels affirmed the attacks’ value by stressing their initial gains and the disparate casualties. John Walters diary, 22 June 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 127–28; Charles DeNoon to his parents, 25 June 1864, 8 July 1864, in Couture, ed., Charlie’s Letters, 224–25 (quotation, p. 225), 226; William Montgomery diary, 22 June 1864, in Montgomery, ed., Georgia Sharpshooter, 54; Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 22 June 1864, in
Paul Higginbotham Letters, VHS; John Vincent diary, 22 June 1864, 29 June 1864, in John Bell Vincent Diary, 1864–1865, VHS; Spencer Welch to Cordelia Strother Welch, 6 July 1864, in Welch, *A Confederate Surgeon’s Letters to His Wife*, 102–03. Welch noted the difference in morale at home and at the front: “in the interior where there is no danger nearly everybody is whipped, and they should be ashamed of themselves.”


62Power, *Lee’s Miserables*, 204–5; Foote, *Civil War*, v. 3, 560. For Confederate praise of Hampton’s raid, see Fred Fleet to his mother, 20 September 1864, in Fleet and Fuller, eds., *Green Mount*, 339; John Walters diary, 19 September 1864, in Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 156; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 22 September 1864, VHS; and Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 18 September 1864, Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS.


Benjamin Seaton diary, 11 May 1864 (first quotation), 12 May 1864 (second and third quotations), in Harold B. Simpson, ed., *The Bugle Softly Blows: The Confederate Diary of Benjamin M. Seaton* (Waco, 1965), 50–51; George Binford to cousin Bob, 3 June 1864, George C. Binford Letters, VHS; James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 12 May 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS.


James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 20 May 1864 [attached to 12 May 1864 letter], James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; third quotation in Hiram Williams diary, 20 May 1864, in Wynne and Taylor, eds., *This War So Terrible*, 76; John Cotton to his wife, 21 May 1864, in Griffith, ed., *Yours Till Death*, 107.

First, second and fifth quotations in James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 20 May 1864 [within 12 May 1864 letter], James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; J. P. Cannon diary, 27 May 1864, Crowson and Brogden, eds., *Bloody Banners*, 69; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 747.

Foote, *Civil War*, v. 3, 354; Samuel Foster dairy, 17 May 1864, in Brown, ed., *One of Cleburne's Command*, 78; Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 23 May 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT; James Iredell Hall to his parents, 30 May 1864, James R. Fleming, ed., *Band of Brothers: Company C, 9th Tennessee Infantry* (Shippensburg, Pa., 1996), 102; J. P. Cannon diary, 1 June 1864, Crowson and Brogden, eds., *Bloody Banners*, 71. As in Virginia, both sides misperceived the enemy's numbers. One Confederate read in a northern newspaper "that they have one hundred and twenty thousand troops and estimate ours at ninety thousand, over estimating both." He was correct. See "Lee" to Maggie Knighton, 27 May 1864, Josiah Knighton and Family Papers, LSU.
George Binford to his cousin Bob, 3 June 1864, George C. Binford Letters, VHS; James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 21 May 1864 [within 12 May 1864 letter], James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS.

John Cotton to his wife, 21 May 1864, in Griffith, ed., Yours Till Death, 106. Cotton also thought the Federals were suffering worse than the Rebels. See John Cotton to his wife, 9 June 1864, in ibid., 112. Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 29 May 1864, Blomquist and Taylor, eds., This Cruel War, 254. Taylor repeated his claim that the enemy would be whipped in a general battle in Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 5 June 1864, ibid., 255. William Nugent to Eleanor (Smith) Nugent, 9 June 1864, Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 179–80; Frank Batchelor to his wife, 30 June 1864, Rugeley, ed., Batchelor–Turner Letters, 1861–1864, 81. Also see Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 13 June 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT. The vignette is from Royster, Destructive War, 319.


McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 748; Foote, Civil War, v. 3, 351–52.


McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 749; Royster, Destructive War, 296–320.

Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 26 June 1864, Blomquist and Taylor, eds., This Cruel War, 264; McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 750; Johnston quoted in Horn, Army of Tennessee, 339; James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 9 July 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; James Iredell Hall to his parents, 8 July 1864, Fleming, ed., Band of Brothers, 104; “Lee” to Maggie Knighton, 9 July 1864, Josiah Knighton and Family Papers, LSU; J. P. Cannon diary, 29 June 1864, Crowson and Brogden, eds., Bloody Banners, 79; Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 3 July 1864, Blomquist and Taylor, eds., This Cruel War, 265; James Bates to his brother-in-law, 8 July 1864, Lowe, ed., A Texas Cavalry Officer’s Civil War, 302–3.

Frank Batchelor to his wife, 30 June 1864, Rugeley, ed., Batchelor–Turner Letters, 1861–1864, 81; Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 9 July 1864, Blomquist and Taylor, eds., This Cruel War, 68; William Nugent to Eleanor (Smith) Nugent, 6 July 1864, Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 188; Lawrence Sullivan Ross to Lizzie Ross, 7 July 1864, Shelton and Morrison, eds., Personal Letters of General Lawrence Sullivan Ross, 64; J. P. Cannon diary, 9 July 1864, Crowson and Brogden, eds., Bloody Banners, 81; James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 9 July 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS.
82Benjamin M. Seaton diary, 9 July 1864, Simpson, ed., The Bugle Softly Blows, 56; Hirma Smith Williams diary, 4 July 1864, Wynne and Taylor, eds., This War So Horrible, 101. Also see Williams’s entry for July 1, in ibid., 100. James C. Bates to his mother and sister, 8 July 1864, Lowe, ed., A Texas Cavalry Officer’s Civil War, 305; Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 15 June 1864, Blomquist and Taylor, eds., This Cruel War, 258; Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 4 July 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT.

83McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 753; Samuel Foster diary, 18 July 1864, in Brown, ed., One of Cleburne’s Command, 106–7; William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 8 August 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 201–2. Hiram Williams did not agree with Johnston’s removal either. See Hiram Smith Williams diary, 18 July 1864, in Wynne and Taylor, eds., This War So Horrible, 104.

84James Bates to his sister, 20 June 1864, in Lowe, ed., A Texas Cavalry Officer’s Civil War, 299; Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 19 July 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT; James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 26 July 1864, in James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS.


86Hiram Smith Williams diary, 22 July 1864, in Wynne and Taylor, eds., This War So Horrible, 106; William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 26 July 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 190; Nugent to Nugent, 8 August 1864, in ibid., 196–97.

87James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 26 July 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 27 July 1864, 10 August 1864, in Thomas B. Hampton Papers, UT; Benjamin Seaton diary, 3 August 1864, in Simpson, ed., The Bugle Blows Softly, 57. For other optimistic reports of Hood’s offensives, see James Bates diary, 23, 30 July 1864, in Lowe, ed., A Confederate Cavalry Officer’s Civil War, 310, 311; John Cotton to his wife, 10 August 1864, in Griffith, ed., Yours Till Death, 117. James McPherson has noted that Atlanta newspapers also heralded Hood’s work as victories. See McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 755.

88Samuel King Vann to Nancy Elizabeth Neel, 25 August 1864, in Elliott, ed., “Most Lovely Lizzie,” 46; John Doyle to Maggie Knighton, 26 August 1864, Josiah Knighton and Family Papers, LSU.

89McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 774.

90William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 10 September 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 206; Samuel Foster diary, 1 September 1864, in Brown, ed., One of Cleburne’s Command, 129; Lawrence Sullivan Ross to Dr. D. A. Tinsley, 14 September 1864, in Shelton and Morrison, eds., Personal Letters of General Lawrence Sullivan Ross, 68; Hiram William Smith diary, 1 September 1864, in Wynne and Taylor, eds., This War So Horrible, 110; Lafayette Orr to his sister, 9 September 1864, in Anderson, ed., Campaigning with Parson’s Texas Cavalry Brigade, 146.
91 William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 10 September 1864 (first and third quotation), 26 September 1864 (second quotation), in Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 206, 213; James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 12 September 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; Samuel Foster diary, 1 September 1864, in Brown, ed., One of Cleburne’s Command, 129.

92 Davis’s speeches quoted in McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 806–807. The troops received Davis with mixed emotions, because many of them blamed him for removing Johnston and consequently losing Atlanta. As for Davis’s analogy between Sherman’s march through Georgia and Napoleon’s retreat from Moscow, William Nugent retorted, “I’d rather witness it than hear ‘talk’ of it beforehand.” William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 26 September 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 213. For other soldiers’ opinions of Davis after the fall of Atlanta, see, James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 12 September 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; Samuel Foster diary, 1 September 1864, in Brown, ed., One of Cleburne’s Command, 129; and Lafayette Orr to his sister, Mary, 5 October 1864, in Anderson, ed., Campaigning with Parson’s Texas Cavalry Brigade, 147.

93 McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 811.

94 John Cotton to his wife, 24 September 1864, in Griffith, ed., Yours Till Death, 118; James Bates to his mother, 10 October 1864, in Lowe, ed., A Texas Cavalry Officer’s Civil War, 320; Samuel Foster diary, 2 October 1864, 7 October 1864, in Brown, ed., One of Cleburne’s Command, 136.

95 Lafayette Orr to his sister, Mary, 9 November 1864, in Anderson, ed., Campaigning with Parson’s Texas Cavalry Brigade, 148; James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 21 October 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; Samuel Foster diary, 14 October 1864, in Brown, ed., One of Cleburne’s Command, 140. When the Rebels passed by Decatur and left it in Federal hands, the troops made excuses for why they did not liberate the heavily guarded town. See, Lafayette Orr to his sister Mary, 9 November 1864, in ibid.; and James Bates to his mother, 8 November 1864, in Lowe, ed., A Texas Cavalry Officer’s Civil War, 327.

96 William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 14 November 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 225; Samuel Foster diary, 21 November 1864, in Brown, ed., One of Cleburne’s Command, 145;

97 Foote, Civil War, v. 3, 663–64.

98 Quotation in Ibid., 669; McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 812–13. For a complete account of Franklin, see James Lee McDonough and Thomas L. Connelly, Five Tragic Hours: The Battle of Franklin (Knoxville, 1983).

99 Samuel Vann to Nancy Elizabeth Neel, 6 December 1864, in Griffith, ed., Most Lovely Lizzie, 63; Lafayette Orr to his father, 7 December 1864, in Anderson, ed., Campaigning with Parson’s Texas Cavalry Brigade, 152; Benjamin Seaton diary, date unknown, in
Simpson, ed., *The Bugle Softly Blows*, 64; Larry J. Daniel, *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in a Confederate Army* (Chapel Hill and London, 1991), 149–50. Some diehard Rebels understood that Franklin was a catastrophe. The day after the battle Samuel Foster observed, “some officers have no men, and some companies no officers... Gen. Hood has betrayed us.” Foster considered Hood’s order to assault “cold blooded Murder.” See Samuel Foster diary, 1 December 1864, in Brown, ed., *One of Cleburne’s Command*, 150–51.

100 Foote, *Civil War*, v. 3, 675–81.


103 Soldier quoted in Royster, *Destructive War*, 187.

Chapter Five

The Gray Grapevine:
Rumor and the War's Final Period

“Rumor / thrives on motion, stronger for the running, / lowly at first through fear, then rearing high, / she treads the land and hides her head in cloud. . . . / Giving her speed on foot and on the wing: / monstrous, deformed, titanic. Pinioned, with / an eye beneath for every body feather, / and strange to say, as many tongues and buzzing / mouths as eyes, as many picked-up ears, / by night she flies between the earth and heaven / shrieking through the darkness, and she never turns / her eye-lids down to sleep. By day she broods, / on the alert, on rooftops or on towers, / bringing great cities fear, harping on lies / and slander even-handedly with truth. / In those days Rumor took an evil joy / at filling countrysides with whispers, whispers, / gossip of what was done, and never done.” Virgil, The Aeneid.¹

Grapevine Telegraphs and Confederate Faith in Ultimate Victory

As Virgil explained long ago, rumors affect perceptions of reality, especially during wartime. Belligerents hunger for basic information and deeper meaning, but a host of elements, including strategy, physical distances, emotions, and the chaos of battle, hinder their search for the truth. Rumors fill the void. Confederates who fought through the final campaigns of the Civil War lived in a world infested with rumors. When thousands faced mortal peril, rumors played on their hopes and fears. As nations hung in the balance, speculations forecasted Union weaknesses and Rebel victory. Because military secrecy and distances obscured events, hearsay elaborated machinations and incidents. This bogus news traveled far and fast, because millions corresponded with loved ones and the media whirled at top speed. As one Confederate soldier explained, the news was “transmitted to us by the ‘grape vine telegraph’, a machine that can be worked by any one,” and “the most ridiculous rumor will be operated as a fact after going a few yards.” The result was an avalanche of information that obstructed Rebel attempts to make sense of the conflict.²
Most rumors, even those spread in the final months of the war, bolstered Confederate hopes for ultimate victory. Some reports promised distant triumphs that did not happen or were actually defeats. Others exaggerated the enemy’s financial, social, and political turmoil. A few rumors even announced European intervention on behalf of the Rebellion. Because this gossip covered every theater of the war, the North, and overseas, it convinced many Rebels that the war was going better than local conditions indicated. Some soldiers even persuaded themselves that the conflict could be won elsewhere if they persisted on their front and avoided a major defeat.

In the end, rumors reveal more about the people and conditions that spread them than about the events they described. Soldiers who sought good news to validate death and suffering often found it in the press and in camp gossip that put a positive spin on unsubstantiated reports. But their faith in wishful rumors should not be dismissed as delusional or merely cathartic. As the conflict worsened, thousands did their best to piece together chaotic times. From the troops’ perspective, hearsay was as tangible as news—indeed they were inseparable.³

*Distant Theaters: Signs That the War Could Still Be Won by the Military*

Throughout the war’s final period, Confederates placed their hopes for triumph in the hands of General Robert E. Lee. Gary Gallagher has claimed that people’s trust in Lee and his ranks was “the single greatest factor engendering Confederate hope after the midpoint of the war.” Because the general and his Army of Northern Virginia had beaten larger adversaries in 1862 and 1863 (Gettysburg being an exception), Rebels across the South expected Lee and his men to trounce Grant’s columns in 1864. For many southerners, Grant’s campaign was another “On to Richmond” fiasco that would yield
bloodshed and frustration for the Federals akin to the results of George McClellan’s efforts in 1862. Some troops in other theaters were so confident of Lee’s eventual victory that they circulated rumors of his triumph before the campaign even started. A week before the 1864 contest for Richmond began, a soldier in Arkansas wrote his wife, “we have stirring official reports of Gen’ls Lee and Beauregard in Va. . . . A Memphis Bulletin in town, I am told, estimates Grant’s loss on his left almost 100,000 men.” Though the sergeant claimed he “never believe[d] anything that paper ever did state,” he still sent the news home.4

When the Virginia campaign erupted in early May, pronouncements of Confederate victories at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania spread across the South. In Kingston, North Carolina, Benjamin Seaton noted in his diary, “it is rumored this morning [May 17] that Lee is whiping the Yankees vary bad at Richmond.” Three days later, William Heartsill reported the same news from his post in Texas: “Good news from Virginia, Lee has whiped the Yankees again.” Within days more complete accounts reached the western troops. In Lewisville, Arkansas, Edwin Fay exalted, “we have been hearing rumors of a great deal of good news here lately.” According to Fay, General Edmund Kirby Smith received “official information” at his headquarters in Shreveport, Louisiana, that Lee’s army “killed, wounded, and captured 40,000 of the enemy, [and] 100 pieces of Artillery” at the cost of 10,000 casualties. Fay concluded that “Grant’s & Meade’s armies are completely discomfited and demoralized,” and hoped that “the infamous wretches may be compelled by their sad experience to make proposals of peace.”5
Pronouncements of Confederate victories in Virginia continued in July, despite the fact that Grant’s enormous army was pinning Lee’s defenders within earshot of the capital. In Louisiana Henry Orr relayed to his father the news that “success was still crowning our arms on every hand” and Lee’s troops were “jubilant.” According to Orr, there was “no fear for the safety of Richmond.” While he was writing his letter, a friend arrived with more rumors:

Mark Alexander has come in from Alexandria and says that Capt. Payne had seen an official dispatch from Gen. Lee stating that on the 28th and 29th ult. Grant made desperate assaults upon Richmond and was defeated and it is said led the last one himself and was killed, which accords with the report of a woman from Vicksburg that the flag was at half mast on account of the death of Grant.

Orr assured his father that “the above news corroborated with the statement of Lieut. Col. Stafford, who left Richmond on the 21st.” Stafford also told Orr that “Grant’s army was completely routed and that ours was in pursuit.” Surveying the information, Orr concluded, “this is glorious news. Indeed, it seems too good to believe.” Henry Orr’s brother, James, heard similar news while defending Atlanta. He told their mother that “we have cheering news from Virginia. Gen. Lee has defeated Grant in every attempt he has made to take Richmond.” James Bates concurred, “Grant has been repulsed with terrible loss in advances on our works at Petersburg.” For the rest of the year, news of heavy Federal casualties and confirmations of Richmond’s safety buoyed Rebels’ faith in Lee and his ultimate triumph in Virginia.⁶

Though the aura that surrounded General Joe Johnston could not compare to Lee’s mystique, Confederates everywhere voiced confidence in the little Virginian’s ability to throw General William Sherman and his men out of Georgia. Many troops in the Army of Northern Virginia still revered Johnston, because he commanded them
before receiving a wound earlier in the war. High hopes colored the troops’ interpretations of news from Georgia. On the last day of June, James Blackman Ligon reacted to reports of Johnston’s defensive stand at Kennesaw Mountain: “the news is exceedingly favourable from the west. Johnson has gained the next thing to a decisive victory, Plans are now on foot which will force Sherman back to Ky if he does not surrender his whole army.” Ligon ignored the fact that Sherman was within twenty miles of Atlanta. In July John Walters and his comrades in Petersburg were “looking daily for news that Johnston has defeated Sherman, in which case we will undoubtedly receive sufficient reinforcements from him to assume the offensive and then, alas poor Grant! Farewell, a long farewell, to all thy glory.”

Confederates often coupled the fates of both armies: if Johnston could thrash Sherman, Lee would undoubtedly dismantle Grant’s army. Because confidence in Lee was so high, the realization of this scheme seemed to hinge on Johnston’s leadership in Georgia. South Carolinian John McLure expressed this logic in a letter to his wife: a “signal defeat of Sherman” would put “a successful issue of the present campaign almost beyond a doubt. And with this result I think we might cherish the fond hope that we were approaching the long looked for dawn of peace. God grant that our dreams may not be altogether visionary.” A friend of McLure’s voiced the same rationale. He worried about Johnston, because “so much depends on the result involving our security here & the final termination of the war.” He figured, “if we can beat them off from Georgia and hold them in check in Va, of which the prospect is good; for the remainder of the summer, I believe we will have a favorable change towards peace before winter.”
Johnston’s constant retreating, however, frustrated Rebels who expected news of a decisive battle for Atlanta. From his vantage point in Virginia, Creed Thomas Davis admitted that Johnston’s backpedaling looked “very discouraging.” John Walters had his hopes disappointed so many times by false reports from the Army of Tennessee that he remarked, “I always wait for the news of the second or third day when I hear of Georgia victories, as the incorrectness of the first dispatches from there has almost passed into a proverb with our army.” In July T. N. Dawkins was “in painful anxiety” about the fate of Johnston’s army. It is telling that many Rebel diarists and correspondents seldom mentioned the Atlanta campaign until General John Bell Hood took command and fought major battles in late July. People wanted front-page news from Georgia; they hungered for Sherman’s annihilation and grew tired of minuscule results and cautious tactics.9

The situation seemed to brighten on July 23 when military reports announced a great Confederate victory outside Atlanta. Southern newspapers printed extras to cover the event. One Richmond paper claimed, “Atlanta is now felt to be safe, and Georgia will soon be free from the foe. . . . Everything seems to have changed in that State from the deepest despondency.” A War Department clerk exalted, “Sherman’s army is doomed.” Henry Conner spoke for many comrades when he expressed a hope that “Hood will be able to exterminate Sherman before he quits him and recover the whole of northern Georgia from his polluting tread.” John Trevilian told his sister how the news appeared at headquarters in Hanover County, Virginia: “Hood in Georgy captured 22 pieces of artillery 2 lines of brest works Killed a General & captured 4 more.” He figured that Grant was silent on his front, because “we gave old Sherman such a whipping.” John Walters tallied the results as they were reported in the press:
We captured many thousand prisoners, a great many pieces of artillery, twenty or thirty stands of colors, and killed, among others, General McPherson... the latter event is worth all the rest for McPherson is, or was, without exception the most able general the North has, or had, though it has always been his misfortune to be subordinate to some favorite of Lincoln’s of inferior talents... And not content with all this, the papers say that Hardee with his corps is in the enemy’s rear while Hood is pressing on his front.

Confirmation of General James McPherson’s death was enough evidence for many Rebels to declare the engagement a success. William Nugent told his wife, “we killed General McPherson, by large odds the finest officer in the Federal Army. He was worth at least a thousand men.” Accounts of this battle exemplify the warped perspective Rebels used to assess military affairs. Confederates often exaggerated enemy casualties and inflated tactical gains while they downplayed their own losses and strategic setbacks. In this case, Hood lost more men than Sherman did and failed to improve the defense of Atlanta, but most Rebels highlighted the death of McPherson and the tactical panache Hood showed by attacking a larger opponent. Using this biased perspective, troops (and the press) could label all but the worst defeats as progress towards independence.10

Rumors of victories at Atlanta persisted in August. Though one of Lee’s soldiers admitted, “the latest [news] is hard to get, from such a distance,” he wrote his brother that “the latest account was that fighting was going on, and the enemy had been driven some miles.” In Arkansas, Edwin Fay reported, “there is a rumor too via Camden that Hood has defeated Sherman & is at present driving him back towards Chattanooga. If true this is glorious.” It was not true. The lines in Georgia remained static throughout August, until Sherman slipped south to cut Atlanta’s last open railroad. These rumors of victory when no battle had been fought further misled troops who were already disoriented by rosy reports of actual engagements. In the end, the Atlanta campaign was too shrouded in
hearsay for distant Rebels to acquire an objective assessment of the theater—whether they sought an accurate picture or not.\textsuperscript{11}

When Atlanta fell on September 1, 1864, many Confederates received the news slowly and doubted its validity. In Winchester, Virginia, on September 6 Creed Thomas Davis read a Richmond paper that announced “big fights in the neighborhood of Atlanta Ga on the 1\textsuperscript{st} & 3\textsuperscript{rd}” but did not report Hood’s evacuation. When Davis and his unit learned the news days later, it was the “topic of conversation” throughout the camp. Davis admitted, “the boys do not reconcile themselves to it so readily.” Soldiers debated Atlanta’s strategic value and tried to convince themselves that the place was expendable. Davis for one doubted the logic of “those Genls, the Editors of the Richmond papers [who] say it never was a place of military importance.” News reached the Trans-Mississippi Department much later. Separated from the rest of the nation by the Federals’ control of the Mississippi, troops in the western Confederacy were often most susceptible to false rumors and misleading reports. On September 12 William Heartsill noted in his diary, “we have rumors this evening that Atlanta has fallen, don’t believe a word of it.” From his camp in Texas, Heartsill did not concede the loss of Atlanta until mid October.\textsuperscript{12}

When Rebels could deny Atlanta’s fate no longer, many men still voiced confidence that their forces would rout Sherman out of the place. Rumors that Hood had recaptured Atlanta followed closely after confirmation that Sherman had taken it. John Walters thought P. G. T. Beauregard’s appointment as commander of the Department of the Southwest and Nathan Bedford Forrest’s successes in Sherman’s rear were signs that the Union ranks would have trouble holding the city. Spencer Welch was “anxious to
hear something from General Hood, for if he can whip Sherman at Atlanta the situation may be entirely changed." He still believed "if Sherman is forced away from Atlanta and we can hold Richmond this winter. . . . we shall have peace." William Heartsill noted that "our soldiers . . . over the river are represented as being in fine spirits, and are confident of ultimate success; they have plenty to eat and wear, and all are cheerful and hopeful, which is certainly good news." In the Petersburg trenches Thomas Elder conceded that Atlanta’s fall "cast a shade of gloom over all" and reported, "the Yankees are greatly rejoicing over the event and predict a speedy end of the Rebellion in Georgia." But Elder thought the event was "mere stuff" that would only postpone the day of independence. When Hood’s ranks reclaimed Dalton from a small Federal garrison there, Hugh Montgomery considered the news a foreshadowing of greater Confederate triumphs. From his vantage point in Shreveport, Louisiana, Montgomery declared, "Hood has taken Dalton together with 900 prisoners[.] He is reported to be moving towards Bridgeport Tenn. Sherman is following him. . . . I suppose our Generals know what they are about & trust they will rout Shermans army. I think good news will soon break upon us."13

Rebel reactions to Atlanta’s fall, the greatest Confederate military setback of 1864, illustrate how positive rumors that preceded and followed bad news could soften the blow of a major defeat. The first word from other battlefields and campaigns was often optimistic and exaggerated: Hood battered Sherman outside Atlanta; Lee smashed Grant in the Wilderness. Then soldiers received a more accurate account that tempered or refuted early declarations of triumph. These sober reports came from officers’ dispatches, letters from relatives who had fought in the battles, or even northern papers. To counter this cold splash of reality, many Rebels took comfort in false rumors that brightened the
situation. Wild news that Hood had retaken the city offset gloomy facts and sustained soldiers’ hopes. Troops probably created and definitely transmitted these rumors in order to avoid the finality and significance of dire events.

Rumors about Hood’s march into Tennessee after the fall of Atlanta exemplify this cycle of good-bad-good news. At first the army’s movement elicited optimistic reports. While on a steamboat on the Alabama River, Thomas Hampton heard in early December that “Hood is said to have whiped the enemy at Murphreysborough.” Within weeks he received “cheering news from East Tenn I hope it is true it is reported that Breckenridge has taken Knoxville & Chata nuga If so we will soon be all right in that quarter.” But in mid December, the Army of Tennessee suffered two crushing defeats at Franklin and Nashville. After receiving and accepting many positive accounts of Hood’s campaign, Hampton at first did not believe news that the army was retreating. “I do not put any confidence in such a report,” he scoffed. But cold facts accumulated over the next four days, and Hampton started to worry about the safety of comrades who had fought at Nashville.14

Other Confederates reacted to news from Tennessee in similar ways. Edward Crenshaw read in northern papers “that Hood was badly defeated before Nashville by Gen. Thomas with the loss of many prisoners and guns, on the 15th, and 16th of this month. The news is very discouraging.” Thomas Goree told his brother:

the situation in Georgia is not at all encouraging. Sherman has succeeded in marching through from Atlanta to the Atlantic coast. . . . [Hood] then starts on a wild-goose chase into Tennessee. After piddling about for a long time, he fights the battle of Franklin. He is again whipped, and in one hour & forty minutes sustains a loss of 4000 men & 13 general officers, some of the best he had.
While writing a diatribe against Hood and Jefferson Davis, Goree received word of the defeat at Nashville. "I have only hoped that we might get his army back again from Tenn. Now I very much fear that it will be entirely destroyed. It is too bad! Well, we must look the thing boldly in the face and try and use every effort to rectify it." But many Rebels would not "look the thing boldly in the face" and preferred to invent better news. Within two weeks of Hood's defeat at Nashville, Hugh Montgomery spread the rumor that Hood captured the city. On New Year's Day, while the remainder of Hood's force straggled out of Tennessee, Edward Crenshaw recorded the hearsay that "Gen. Hood had turned on Gen. Thomas and defeated him. I hope it is true." Like their response to Atlanta's loss, troops spread positive rumors shortly after the disaster in Tennessee in an attempt to ignore terrible implications.¹⁵

Confederates also inflated their nation's military condition by emphasizing victories in minor theaters. Throughout 1864 smaller Rebel armies and independent cavalry commands bested Union adversaries from Arkansas to Kentucky to Florida. Troops were slow to realize, or at least admit, that these events had little to no impact on the central contests in Virginia and Georgia. Instead many soldiers assumed that a string of minor triumphs acquired a strategic importance that outweighed their individual value. Or as Thomas Goree put it, "may these victories be the harbingers to greater ones, and then may our Noble Country having won its independence be long blessed with peace."¹⁶

Before the eastern campaigns commenced in spring 1864, the South buzzed with reports of victories in the Trans-Mississippi Department. Shrouded from the rest of the Confederacy behind a wall of Union gunboats, the Rebellion's western half was dark and distant in ways that promoted exaggerations and legends. Moreover, by the war's final
phase, the Trans-Mississippi had become a purgatory for Federal generals who had failed in the East. Once across the river, these leaders faced resourceful adversaries, merciless guerrillas, and vengeful Indians. Chief among the tarnished commanders was Nathaniel Banks, an important Massachusetts Republican who could rally votes but not men. In 1862 General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson whipped, scattered, and propelled Banks and his ranks out of the Shenandoah Valley. In April 1864 Banks was leading a blue column down the Red River south of Shreveport, Louisiana, when he met a determined set of Rebels commanded by Richard Taylor, Zachary Taylor’s son and Stonewall’s protégé. The graybacks routed their opponents at the Battle of Mansfield.

Accounts of Mansfield grew in stature as they traveled farther from the battleground. Garrisoned in eastern Texas, William Heartsill heard the news from a lieutenant the day after the event: “he reports that a fight has taken place forty miles below Shreveport, in which the Confederates were victorious; 2000 prisoners, 20 peices [sic] of Artillery and a large wagon train captured.” This report was highly accurate. Taylor inflicted about 2200 casualties and seized twenty guns and two hundred supply wagons. Ten days later and across the Mississippi, Reuben Pierson read a newspaper report that credited Taylor and General Edmund Kirby Smith (Taylor’s superior) for the victory that smashed Bank’s Red River Campaign. By the time the news reached the Army of Tennessee, General Smith was receiving full credit, and the Union casualties had skyrocketed to 14,000. Lafayette Orr told his brothers, “we have news of a grate victory in Louisiana; the report is Kirby Smith defeated Banks with the loss of fourteen thousand men, if that be so.” Likewise, Thomas Key recorded “the rumor from the Trans-
Mississippi to the effect that General Smith had whipped Banks, killing, wounding, and capturing 14,000 Yankees.  

Nathan Bedford Forrest’s mythical persona and his constant activity provided soldiers in distant theaters with a persistent stream of news and rumors. Like Francis Marion in the American Revolution and John Singleton Mosby and John Morgan in the Rebellion, Forrest’s success as a raider captivated his countrymen’s attention and esteem. They called him “the Wizard of the Saddle.” He and the Confederacy’s other bold riders exemplified white southerners’ Cavalier myth. Moreover, being independent of a larger army meant Forrest and his cavalry could strike anywhere at anytime. This freedom added plausibility to rumors that Forrest’s men had won victories in obscure places and against great odds. And the horse soldiers did accomplish things that sounded like folklore. During an August 1864 midnight raid to Memphis, Forrest’s troopers nearly captured three Union generals. One fled to the protection of Fort Pickering’s guns, another ran through back alleys in his nightshirt, and the third was sleeping in someone else’s bed (whose bed became a matter of embarrassing speculation). In the final stage of the war, Forrest’s soldiers (numbering from 2,000 to 5,000 strong) criss-crossed Union-held territory in West Tennessee, North Mississippi, North Alabama, and Kentucky. They captured Fort Pillow and murdered its black defenders, routed a force twice their size at Tishomingo Creek, Mississippi, crippled the Tennessee & Alabama railroad, stole 800 Federal horses, seized two Union gunboats, and destroyed Federal property worth millions of dollars.

These triumphs appeared in the papers like tales of adventure, and soldiers across the Confederacy heralded the accounts. In February 1864 Junius Bragg told his wife the
rumor that Forrest had captured Memphis. It was not true. Months later, James Brannock heard “glorious news from Forrest that he got Col Hawkins who was raiding in West Tenn.” Nine days later Brannock was still receiving vivid stories of Forrest’s activity. Brannock considered the victory at Tishomingo Creek, “the grandest thing of the war.” William Nugent agreed and wrote his wife, “when you read the description of Forrest’s fight at Tishomingo Creek I recon you will think the Mississippians, Tennesseans & Kentuckians can fight.” In April 1864 Rebels relished the news that Forrest had entered Kentucky, destroyed Union storehouses, and escaped with spoils and fresh recruits. Benjamin Seaton recorded, “it is rumored in camp that General Forrest have burnt and destroyed Peddukey [Paducah, Kentucky] on the Ohio River wich is a vary nice place.” Even the Fort Pillow atrocity garnered praise from Confederate soldiers. Spencer Welch told his wife: “the capture of Fort Pillow by Forrest was excellent for us.” Thomas Key tallied the results: “General Forrest . . . captured Fort Pillow, killing 400 negro soldiers and 150 Yankees, and taking 150 white prisoners with the capture of 6 guns and $100,000 worth of Federal stores.”

Rebels received so many glowing reports from the Trans-Mississippi Department that they often accepted positive rumors that were dead wrong. Reviewing successes across the river, Reuben Pierson included reports that General Sterling Price had captured General Frederick Steele and 10,000 of his men and that Banks had surrendered to Taylor. On the same day Edwin Fay contended that General Joe Shelby snatched General John Thayer and 3,000 bluecoats in Arkansas. He assured his wife, “this is deemed reliable.” When Forrest raided Memphis, Benjamin Seaton believed reports that the band of horse soldiers had taken control of the entire city.
Minor successes, whether true or false, heartened veterans who sought signs of peace and independence in camp conversations and newspaper columns. Generals understood this and sometimes drafted official statements that informed their troops of distant victories. While his men fought through the mud and horror of Spotsylvania Court House, Lee twice alerted his troops of recent success in the Trans-Mississippi and the Shenandoah Valley. John Walters noted the events in his diary, “today a congratulatory order from General Lee was read to the troops regarding the successes of Kirby, Smith, and Price in the Trans-Mississippi Department, and Imboden, James, and Morgan in the Valley.” The following day “another order . . . from General Lee was read to the army regarding the victory of Breckenridge over Sigel in the Valley.” General John C. Breckenridge, former Vice President of the United States, had beaten General Franz Sigel one hundred miles north of Lynchburg, Virginia, at a railroad juncture critical to the Army of Northern Virginia’s supply line.  

Of all the secondary campaigns of 1864, General Jubal Early’s invasion of Maryland captivated Rebels the most. In July 1864, while the main armies fought for Richmond, Petersburg and Atlanta, Early led a detached corps of 15,000 men across the Potomac and marched towards Washington and Baltimore. On July 9 the veteran columns scattered a hastily assembled Union force outside of Frederick, Maryland, and raced for the Federal capital. In two days they were five miles from the White House. Northern newspapers and Washington officials screamed for reinforcements, because Grant had recently taken the city’s garrison to replace his losses in Virginia. Only hospital patients, bureaucrats, and militiamen stood between Early’s men and a dramatic
reversal of fortunes. Hearing the news across the sea, the London *Times* concluded, “the Confederacy is more formidable than ever.”

Reading the panic in northern papers and hoping that this third invasion of the North would be the charm, Confederates enjoyed weeks of good rumors and fantastic predictions regarding Early’s campaign. Even before the force had crossed the Potomac, John Walters reported, “rumors of a rather startling character have been circulating among our troops regarding the movements of General Early.” Paul Higginbotham read about Early’s advance on the capital in copies of northern papers he received from enemy pickets. The news seemed too good to be true, but Higginbotham believed Yankee reports of their own misfortunes. On July 14 he told his brother the rumors:

Grant has certainly sent a Corps to Washington, and tis thought is sending his army off as fast as he can, not to excite suspicion. But I doubt it very much. Ewell [he mean’s Early] with 40,000 men is certainly in Maryland (The Yankee papers say 40,000) I cant tell how many men we have over there, but Ewell would certainly not go into enemy country so far unless he had a pretty strong force. Todays paper states that a battle was fought at Frederick City on the 10th in which the enemy [was] repulsed with heavy loss, and were retreating on Baltimore. The Governors of Md and Penn have called out the malitia, but they refused to come. I hope he may take both Baltimore & Washington.

Though he and his comrades defended Richmond, Higginbotham noted, “a Rumor is flying around this evening, that we will leave here soon I shall not be at all surprised if our entire Army is not on the road to Maryland ere long.” Troops speculated on which city would be seized first, Baltimore or Washington. Creed Thomas Davis read that Early was “in the vicinity of Baltimore.” The next day, Giles Buckner Cooke heard from an officer “the glorious news” that Early was within three miles of Washington. “God grant that he may capture and burn the place down to the ground,” he remarked, “for it is a
perfect Sodom and Gomorrah.” On July 17 James Brannock wrote home that “at last accounts our forces had surrounded Washington & were shelling the city. Every body here seems impressed with the idea that we will soon have peace.” James Orr believed Confederate newspaper reports that placed the invaders both three miles within Baltimore and five miles from Washington. The paper also claimed that Early’s men liberated all the prisoners at Point Lookout, Maryland.23

Unfortunately for the Rebels, Early’s campaign ended with ignominy rather than victory. Grant sent the battle-hardened Sixth Corps in time to rescue Washington, and when other Federal troops closed on Early’s army, the general prudently headed south. Instead of sacking Baltimore or the capital, the Rebels plundered small towns. In Hagerstown they demanded $20,000 in greenbacks. In Frederick they charged $200,000, drank Francis Preston Blair’s wine cellar and burned down the residence of his son, Montgomery Blair, the postmaster-general. They also ignited the governor’s private home. On July 30 Early’s cavalry crossed into Pennsylvania and levied $500,000 from the citizens of Chambersburg. When the people refused to pay, the soldiers torched the place.24

All these victories from major and minor theaters, whether they were true, exaggerated, or false, colored how Rebels perceived the Confederacy’s military condition in 1864. Positive news convinced thousands of soldiers that the war was winnable and that the next report from Lee, Johnston, Hood, or Early, could decide the struggle in their favor. Perhaps the amount of attention troops gave to other campaigns hints that they were doubtful of success in their own theater. Men stuck in the trenches of Petersburg or routed out of Georgia probably imagined that distant armies would prevail before they
could win the war themselves. In the end, far-off triumphs charmed troops who sought an end to hardships, bolstered their morale, and thus protracted a war that seemed far from lost.  

Wall Street, Copperheads, and Napoleon III: Alternative Ways to Independence

Though many Rebels applauded Early’s Maryland raid out of vengeance, they also hoped that firsthand experiences with war’s terror would convince northerners to advocate peace with Confederate independence. John Walters believed, “the blazing roofs of Chambersburg may induce the people of the North to look at this war in an entirely different light.” As discussed in chapter three, popular perceptions of the northern foe as cowardly, corrupt, money-grubbing, ethnically inferior, and politically divided encouraged Rebels to expect ultimate victory through the enemy’s collapse. Many Confederates assumed that nationhood could be achieved more easily by breaking the Federals’ will (rather than their power) to prosecute the contest. This logic spawned countless rumors that avowed shaky Federal finances, a growing political chasm, and European plans to intervene on behalf of the Confederacy. Throughout 1864 these scenarios of hope brightened southern newspaper columns, personal correspondence, camp rumors, political addresses, and sermons. Few Confederate soldiers could avoid the speculations or resist their contagious optimism.

Some Confederates followed the price of gold in the North as if it gauged Federal weakness. As James McPherson has explained, “the price of gold measured the value of
the dollar in relation to the value of gold. A price of 191 meant that this many greenback dollars were required to purchase 100 gold dollars.” Rebels understood that the price of gold rose when northern confidence fell, so they used this number to assess the impact of setbacks on Union morale. In March 1864 William Nugent observed, “Gold has advanced in the North and declined with us.” He predicted, “if ever the money pulse in the United States becomes excited to fever heat, Greenbacks won’t be worth a copper and the fighting is over.” Nugent added, “Old Grant will give us trouble and once defeated, the North will become dispirited and lose all interest in our care for the war. . . . A heavy financial crash [will] startle the Yankees from their present prosperity. When once they cease to make money out of the war, they will quit.” Reuben Pierson agreed: “the federals are all ready too far gone into the maelstrom of financial ruin to ever return and every moment brings them nearer to the fatal whirlpool, that is to wreck their already shackling ship of state.” Whether Pierson was next discussing military affairs or still speculating on the enemy’s ruinous circumstances is unclear, but his opinion may have applied to both: “they cannot retreat from the position they have chosen and to remain where they are or attempt to go forward is certain death.”

As Federal casualty lists lengthened, Rebels watched the price of gold skyrocket. After three weeks of carnage in the Virginia and Georgia, Hugh Montgomery noted that gold was 210 in New York. Though his figure was high, the price of gold did rise from 171 to 191 during the last weeks of May 1864. Montgomery read in various New Orleans papers that “the State of New York has already commenced repudiating it[s] foreign debt by paying the interest in Greenbacks. The banks of New York City are compelled to pay off the amount that is wanting fifty thousand dollars in gold much to their regret I
Episcopalian clergyman Stephen Elliott argued that Federal finances were in worse shape. In a fast day sermon, Elliott informed his congregation in Savannah, Georgia: "already has the United States government accumulated a permanent debt of Fifteen hundred millions of Dollars, besides a floating debt, which it dares not look in the face, of several hundred millions more, amounting together to one half the national debt of Great Britain." In July, Paul Higginbotham read in the northern press that "there is some talk of Peace meetings at various places in the North, and a growing dissatisfaction with the people. They want this war to close. Prices are going up rapidly in the north now, and gold is now up to 250 and going up." Many Rebels convinced themselves that the Federal war effort would self-destruct if the Confederacy withstood the enemy's final, desperate campaigns for Richmond and Atlanta. 28

Confederates hoped that the high price of gold and unparalleled casualty figures of 1864 would intensify the presidential campaigns and divide the enemy further. Because each Federal stalemate or reversal seemed to empower northern Democrats and peace advocates, many Rebels imagined that a stunning victory could elect a candidate that favored their independence. As Thomas Key contended, "the North is divided in sentiment and cannot prosecute the war much longer. Let Lee in Virginia and General Johnston here gain decisive victories and greenbacks will almost be worthless and peace men in the North will multiply like flies in the spring." In August 1864 Edgeworth Bird concurred that a rout of Sherman's army "would ensure peace. The North seems almost ripe for it." A Confederate editor expressed the matter bluntly: "Every bullet we can send . . . is the best ballot that can be deposited against [Lincoln's] election. The battle-fields of 1864 will hold the polls of this momentous decision. If the tyrant at Washington be
defeated, his infamous policy will be defeated with him, and when his party sinks no
other war party will rise in the United States.” The possibility that a growing peace
movement might sabotage the Federal war effort heartened thousands of Rebels
throughout the spring and summer of 1864. 29

Many Confederates used Union newspapers to support their faith in a burgeoning
northern peace movement. Throughout the 1864 campaign, northern editors who opposed
Lincoln and his party bolstered Confederate morale as much or even more than the
southern press did. As early as January 1864, Edwin Fay conjectured, “we may be able to
hold out Twelve months longer but I don’t think the Yanks can with the pressure on
them. The Presidential Campaign is already beginning to open in their papers.” A
comment from the New York Sunday Mercury concerning the election exemplifies what
Rebels read in the enemy press:

It is not to be disguised that the wisest men at Washington, as well
as throughout the country, look with fear and dread upon the issues
of the coming Presidential canvass. The temper of the people is so
excited, the issues so vital, the disturbances—civil, social, and
political—created by the war are so profound, that it is feared an
excited Presidential canvass will plunge the nation into chaos.

Both the Richmond Sentinel and the Augusta Constitutionalist reprinted this excerpt in
April 1864. Because such news came from the North, Confederates received the reports
as facts rather than as the editorials comments they in fact were. In July James Orr told
his mother, “tis thought by a great many that the war wont last longer as the people of the
north and the Northern Congress is getting badly split up. We get Northern papers from
the Yankey pickets tolerable regular. . . . Their papers also state that the Northern people
are getting tired of the war and all want peace.” In August Edgeworth Bird asked his
wife, “have you noticed the large number of Northern papers that call for peace, as shown
by extracts from them? Surely the public mind there has perpetrated a complete somerset.” John Walters agreed. From Petersburg’s trenches he observed that many Union papers “are becoming clamorous for peace. God grant that they may soon become satisfied.”

Hopes that a peace movement would cripple their foes encouraged many Confederates to exaggerate northern internal strife and accept bizarre rumors on the subject. Junius Bragg passed on the story that “Wisconsin Troops will return home as soon as the spring opens, for the purpose of carrying on a partisan war in their own state.” The report bolstered Bragg’s “abiding faith in our ultimate success.” Paul Higginbotham centered his expectations on Ohio. He wrote his brother that “some fellow from Ohio is in favor of a Western Confederacy, & a breaking off from the New England States.” Though he claimed, “I put no faith in such pieces,” Higginbotham then related the fact that “the 63rd Ohio Regt., was on picket yesterday, and said that if their officers made them charge our works they intended to surrender, and asked us not to fire on them.” He affirmed, “I think now as I always have done, that we will yet gain our Independence, and I firmly believe the time is near at hand.” James Albright heard “that Gov. Seymour of New York has called out the militia to assist Gen. Dix in opposition to the U.S. government draft.” Edgeworth Bird believed reports that “Lincoln has postponed the draft—he’s afraid to try it.” In Mobile, Grant Taylor conveyed the rumor that “a good many of the Yankee prisoners whose term of service is out are taking the oath and joining our side because Lincoln will not exchange for them.” Thomas Key bolstered his morale with speeches given by politicians who opposed Lincoln. In April he observed, “the news from the North shows that the chasm is opening and the difficulties increasing. Senator
Henderson, of Missouri, has made a speech in the U.S. Senate taking the attitude that the Union must be all free States or the South be let alone. If the slave power is too strong for subjugation, then the sooner the war closes the better.” Key confessed, “I drew much hope and pleasure from this speech, and I felt while reading it that peace was not distant.” Within days he found other speeches given in the House of Representatives that favored “peace and recognition of the Confederate States government.”

As the presidential election approached, talk about financial disasters, peace movements, and Federal divisiveness intensified throughout the Confederacy. As William Nugent noted, “our main hope now is the disagreement existing among the political parties North.” Troops across the South sought and swapped political rumors with an enthusiasm that matched their interest in distant battles and military theaters. They read northern papers for shifts in public opinion, debated which candidate would best serve Confederate interests, and asked enemy pickets who they were voting for. Some Rebels even saw the event as the Almighty’s way of ending the war in the Confederates’ favor. Edwin Fay explained, “God will work it all out for the best in some way I believe. I want to see the Yankee nation without a Govt. enjoying what they are so fond of, a state of Anarchy and confusion.”

In August soldiers anticipated the results of the Democratic convention as if the nomination itself would settle the war. Thomas Elder thought “there is some hope of peace now,” because “the Yankee people seem greatly exercised about peace. The Chicago Democratic Convention meets today and I hope it will nominate a peace man and that the Yankee people will elect him.” On the same day John Walters recorded, “much anxious speculation is going on among our troops as to the probable candidate”
for the Democrats. He admitted, “though I think that good will result from the election of either a war or a peace man,” Walters would not be “surprised if both wings formed a compromise and worked together.” The next day Creed Thomas Davis noted, “the learned Howitzers are already discussing [the Convention’s] probable results on the war.” Though Rebels’ expectations for the election were too high, thousands who were stuck in trenches nourished each other’s dreams that something as faraway and harmless as the presidential campaign could decide the war for them and send them home.33

George McClellan’s nomination provoked a mixed response from Rebels who had hoped for a peace candidate. Thomas Elder was pleased with the outcome. “Whilst [McClellan] is not as thorough going a peace man as some others,” Elder figured, “he is the best man for us that the democrats have any chance of electing. Better they should succeed with McClellan than be defeated with a decided peace man.” He predicted that the Peace Democrats would control McClellan if the Confederates were successful prior to the election. Then, “if McClellan is elected (and I think his chances are good) I believe we shall have peace.” William Nugent assumed if McClellan were elected “our negroes will not be disturbed I think at all. The negro soldiers will be disbanded and returned to their owners, and the whole subject will be settled by arbitration, not by the sword.” In contrast, John Walters bemoaned rumors of the Democrats’ war platform. “If this is so, we may well ask, ‘How long, oh Lord, how long?’”34

When some Confederates read McClellan’s hawkish acceptance speech, its language extinguished their visions of a speedy peace. John Walters wrote:

a great deal of gloomy feeling is taking possession of our soldiers in consequence of the uncompromising war spirit which breathes through the letter of acceptance written by MacClellan, and many fears are expressed that if Lincoln is re-elected (as is most probable),
from the symptoms of a split in the Democratic Party, that this war will be continued another four year term, in which case it is a matter of great speculation as to who will live to see the end of it.

According to Walters, Lincoln’s reelection would *lengthen* the war but not affect its outcome. After McClellan’s speech soldiers’ across the South debated which politician would better serve the Confederacy. The fact that many Rebels started to prefer Lincoln’s reelection reveals how malleable and flawed their perceptions of the “big picture” could be. At first most soldiers desired a Peace Democrat, because they hoped northerners would accept peace with Confederate independence. When McClellan voiced his commitment to preserving the Union, many troops expressed concerns that he and the Democrats might lure southern states back to the Union by offering compromises that would stop the bloodshed. Days before McClellan’s speech, William Nugent stated, “I hope everything from the Democratic Party.” After the address (and only three days after this previous comment), Nugent suspected McClellan would offer a reconstructed Constitution that would draw every Confederate state back to the Union except Virginia and South Carolina. Nugent elaborated, “we were all very much depressed when we read McClellan’s letter of acceptance. He comes out so decidedly for War that the question is gravely discussed whether Lincoln would not be preferable.” Nugent does not mention, let alone consider, the strength of Lincoln’s war platform, even though a month before he had written that Lincoln’s reelection meant the war will “be continued to the bitter end regardless of loss or expense.” James Brannock concurred that McClellan was dangerous, because “he will attempt to bring about peace by a ‘reconstruction of the Union’ & will present terms so favorable that a great many of those in the South who are *lukewarm* in the Cause & tired of the War will be in favor of accepting them.” Somersaults in
Confederate perceptions like this one helped many soldiers retain confidence in the war when fresh events dashed their prior hopes.\textsuperscript{35}

Some Rebels reasoned that Lincoln would be better for the Confederacy, because his reelection could increase dissension and perhaps even induce other states to secede. James Brannock asked his wife what she thought of the campaign and admitted that “we hardly know what to think of it here.” Nonetheless, Brannock favored Lincoln, because “if Lincoln be elected it will probably be the cause of revolution in the North Western states & will end in securing our independence.” Clergyman Stephen Elliott offered the most elaborate explanation for why Lincoln was the candidate for the Rebellion:

We need his folly and his fanaticism for another term; his mad pursuit of his peculiar ideas. It is he that is ordained to lead his people to destruction . . . he will pursue war with redoubled fury, until at last satiated with misrule, the sober thinking men of the North will perceive, that submission to him is utter and perpetual ruin. Then will come the conflict which shall deliver us, when we shall be obliged to confess, (for it will not come until we are in our last extremity); “It is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” All things are working together for our good, the fall of Atlanta, the victories at Mobile, our reverses of whatever kind, are so many links in the re-election of Lincoln, and therefore, so many links in the chain of our deliverance. Every thing which gives them confidence, is so much in our favor, because it goads them on in their career of madness.

Elliott delivered this speech within weeks of the fall of Atlanta. Perhaps he and others realized Lincoln’s election was probable after that event and tried to convince themselves that Lincoln had been their choice from the beginning of the contest. Spencer Welch wrote, “old Abraham will come in again, and I believe it would be best for us. McClellan might have the Union restored, if elected. I should prefer to remain at war for the rest of my life rather than to have any connection with the Yankees again.” John Walters spouted rhetoric akin to Elliott’s and hoped for Lincoln’s victory: “I think that peace is
not so far off by that, as it will be by the election of McClellan. In the former event, there is a possibility of the Pacific States leaving the Old Union to form a Confederacy of their own, and in this case the Northwestern States will most probably cut loose from the Eastern States and this of itself would end the war.” Walters also feared that McClellan would collect “men and means in sufficient number and quantity to overwhelm the shattered remains of the past three and a half years of hard fighting.” He did not voice concerns that the Rebellion’s “shattered remains” might crumble after Lincoln’s election. Thomas Key hoped that election day itself would “result in strife and even bloodshed between the peace and war men.” When Lincoln won the election, many Confederates noted the event with nonchalance and brevity, as if to say they expected it all along and did not give it much importance. Creed Thomas Davis remarked in his diary that Lincoln’s reelection was “nothing more than all expected.”

Hopes for foreign intervention comprised a third scenario by which the Confederacy could gain independence without having to win decisive military campaigns. In early 1864 a minister in Richmond claimed that negotiation with Europe “has become, with us, an exploded idea. It may be employed, but its repeated delusions have ceased to tempt the national expectation.” Nevertheless, many of his countrymen still cherished the pipe dream. Rebels pointed out that America won independence through French assistance; so foreign armies and armadas (or at least the threat of such forces) might compel the Union to accept Confederate independence.

Whenever Lord Palmerston, Napoleon III, or Confederate emissaries squeaked about European involvement, rumors of elaborate alliances electrified the South. A wave of rumors swept the nation in March 1864. General Lawrence Ross wrote home that a
fellow officer had telegraphed him "to the effect that France has recognized the Confederacy." The next day William Nugent wrote, "startling rumors have reached us recently enlivening our hopes and brightening our prospects. It is said that France has recognized us, and Spain and Mexico & Austria." Thomas Key even drafted an article that expounded "the expediency of making a commercial treaty with France and Spain, proposing to give them the exclusive transportation of cotton from the South if they would furnish the navy to open and keep unobstructed the Confederate ports." Key argued that "the colonies made similar concessions to France in 1776" and the Confederacy was most wanting in naval power "to retake and possess the Mississippi River, and to open her harbors." Rumors flared again in January 1865. Nugent told his wife, "England & France will not recognize Lincoln as President of anything but the Northern States after the 4\textsuperscript{th} of March, and a war seems almost inevitable. The Northern papers are proposing a coalition of the two armies [Federal and Confederate] to whip England and preserve the Monroe doctrine." "Let us hold on and hope,” he concluded, "the day star of our Independence will soon dawn." \textsuperscript{38}

Confederates' interest in northern and foreign circumstances, like their attention to distant campaigns, suggests that Rebels lacked confidence in their ability to win the war where they were fighting it. These hopes that far-off events would deliver Confederate victory materialized in countless rumors: our army won a decisive battle hundreds of miles from here; Wall Street will collapse; northerners want a peace advocate in the White House; and European powers are poised to recognize our nation and insure its sovereignty. However desperate and delusional these scenarios seem from
historical hindsight, optimistic hearsay brightened soldiers’ perspectives and sustained their morale to the very end.

Rumor Mills: The Sources of Misinformation

How accurate was the hearsay that swirled through Rebel camps and where did it originate? Most rumors contain a kernel of truth. Considering the unpredictability of warfare, some Confederate rumors were fair speculations. Others were pipe dreams. Most soldiers strove to separate real news from bogus talk, because they sought truth and meaning within the universe of battle. But troops’ passionate involvement in the conflict and their need to justify hardships sometimes made optimistic rumors too appealing to deny. Like all constructions of reality, the Confederate quest for meaning was both a cognitive and an emotional endeavor.

Confederate optimism about their armies’ successes was most justified in Virginia, where Rebels inflicted roughly twice as many losses on Grant’s ranks while preventing them from capturing Richmond and Petersburg. Historian James McPherson described the beginning of the Virginia campaign as “bloody beyond all precedent.” In seven weeks Grant lost 65,000 men, about the total strength of Lee’s army. The carnage prompted General Gouverneur K. Warren, commander of the Federal Fifth Corps, to cry, “for thirty days it has been one funeral procession past me, and it has been too much!” If the slaughter impressed a regular Army officer like Warren, it demoralized common
soldiers. The carnival of death left survivors hesitant to charge enemy defenses and more eager than ever for peace. A list of the popular songs sung in Union camps and sold on the northern homefront expresses the depths of war weariness in the spring and summer of 1864: *When This Cruel War Is Over; Bear This Gently to My Mother; Yes, I Would the War Were Over; Brother, Will You Come Back?; Tell Me, Is My Father Coming Back?* The chorus of *Tenting on the Old Camp Ground* put it best, “Many are the hearts that are weary tonight; Wishing for the war to cease.” For the rest of the year, the stalemate in the Richmond and Petersburg trenches seemed to mock Federal hopes and confirm Rebel boasts that no amount of Union troops could take the capital from Lee and his veterans.³⁹

If positive reports from Virginia were based on facts, Rebels’ optimistic accounts of other campaigns seem largely unfounded. Troops ignored some setbacks or dismissed their implications. Mobile collapsed because of incompetent Confederate leadership and Union naval dominance, but few graybacks wrote about it. When the *Alabama* sunk off the coast of France, Rebels conceded that they had lost their best blockade runner but remained hopeful. Thomas Elder argued, “it is a serious loss to us, but, by no means, an irreplaceable one.” John Walters went even further: “[Captain Ralph] Semmes is one of the inexpressible men impossible to whip, and I should not be surprised if in less than three months he was out in a larger and better vessel.” Walters failed to explain how the Confederacy would build or buy such a ship.⁴⁰

The greatest Confederate setbacks of 1864 came at the hands of Sherman’s legions. Their success in Georgia—the fall of Atlanta, the March to the Sea, and the capture of Savannah—demonstrated the full power of Federal armies. William Nugent admitted, “few of our leaders would have supposed that Sherman would have the
hardihood to march so far south; but he has done it.” Nugent and thousands of his comrades reconciled “the mortifying presence of an invading army so far into the heart of our country” with their hopes for other theaters. It is significant that Hood’s troops did not stay in Georgia to oppose Sherman’s momentum. By embarking on a flight of fancy into Tennessee while Sherman accomplished so much in their rear, soldiers in the Army of Tennessee and throughout the Confederacy diverted themselves from both heavy casualties and hard facts. Remarkably, many of these men still found hope after their Tennessee raid broke in blood at Franklin and Nashville. The exploits of other figures, notably Nathan Bedford Forrest who saved much of the Army of Tennessee from capture with a tenacious rear-guard defense, offered positive distractions to those who sought them.\footnote{41}

For a time the Union suffered political fractions as severe as Confederates had imagined. Before September the presidential election was a wedge that threatened to divide the United States as severely as the 1860 contest had. In addition to heated differences between Democrats and Republicans, both parties split internally. Republicans argued over the war’s prosecution and plans for reconstruction while Democrats differed over continuing the war or pursuing compromise and peace. Republican leaders sought another candidate, and for a while it looked like Salmon P. Chase, John C. Fremont, Benjamin Butler, or Ulysses Grant would run for office. Lincoln’s nomination in June did not resolve party discord, and Lincoln himself expected to lose the contest during the trying summer months. Re-election was questionable not only because of McClellan’s candidacy, but because no president had served a second term since Andrew Jackson. Many Americans opposed the principle of re-election,
especially during wartime. The unprecedented growth of the Federal authority, most
evident in taxes—including the first Federal income tax—and Lincoln’s suspension of
the writ of habeas corpus, provoked many northerners to ask if the Union that survived
the war would be worth having. These cracks in northern unity were serious until
Sherman captured Atlanta on September 1, thereby raising Unionists’ hopes for imminent
victory, and securing Lincoln’s re-election. But because the enemy’s circumstances
appeared so dire for much of the year, many Confederates could not or would not admit
that failure in Georgia erased all hopes for a northern internal collapse.

Though the price of gold rose on Wall Street and peace advocates grew louder
when Grant’s casualty lists swelled, similar problems threatened the Rebellion with equal
or greater force. While Union inflation reached 80 percent during the war, Confederate
inflation passed 9,000 percent. Copperheads generated attention in the northern press for
their defense of civil liberties and their calls for peace, but southern Unionists and peace
advocates also gained numbers and temerity as the war worsened. Secret societies like the
Order of the Heroes of America aided Union forces and encouraged Confederate
desertion. In North Carolina William Holden, a candidate for governor, urged the Old
North State to negotiate a separate peace with the Union. Troops read about the
disaffected homefront in letters and newspapers. One North Carolinian blamed Holden
for recent desertions and thought “the N C soldiers passing through Raleigh on Furlough
ought to stop and hang the old son of a bitch.” Perhaps men like him who were enraged
and embarrassed by internal trouble (and concerned that it might infect the military)
projected similar problems onto the enemy. Belligerents often favorably compare
themselves to their foe, but Confederates—perhaps because they fought a civil war—
seemed obsessed with being better than their adversaries in every way. The fact that so many Rebels could deride northern economics and peace movements without a hint of irony illustrates how biased their perceptions of the war could be. Even during the war’s final period many Confederates assumed if things were bad in the South, the North must be on the brink of insolvency and anarchy.42

If rumors of distant victories and northern unrest affected Confederates’ perceptions of the war so deeply, who generated these reports? The first and most obvious source was the media, both North and South. Civil War newspapers, like the war itself, were on the cusp of modernity. Just as the war’s weaponry often outran knowledge that could lessen the bloodshed, like military strategy and medicine, so too did advances in communication, namely the telegraph, railroads, and steam-powered presses, outpace ideas like journalistic objectivity that could responsibly handle the impact of nationwide reporting. As a result, thousands of eager readers digested highly partisan and often bogus news in their daily papers.

A number of factors, including inaccurate information channels, speedy circulation, and media competition turned the nation’s largest newspapers into its greatest rumor mills. Let us consider the path of a typical battlefield report. Officers fighting a battle often provided the first accounts of it. During the fury, couriers, staff members, and combat leaders encountered a new participant in modern warfare—the professional war correspondent. Though some correspondents had worked in the Mexican War and the Crimean War, the 150 southerners (and 350 northerners) who followed Civil War armies in search of news were pioneers of their trade with few standards to guide them. Eager for a story, the reporters interviewed any officer they could grab for news from the front
lines. With the day’s results still inconclusive, having seen but a part of the chaotic action, the officers most likely told reporters that they could not speak for the entire army but their own men had performed gallantly. Southern correspondents fashioned these disparate but positive accounts into a coherent story and flashed it to Richmond or Atlanta via telegraph lines while the cannons still boomed.43

When editors received these reports, they faced two temptations. First, if they printed the story without waiting for confirmation, they could “get the scoop” before competing papers reached the streets. Because the steam-powered rotary press enabled large papers to print thousands of copies an hour, editors could put an “extra” (literally an extra edition of the daily paper) in readers’ hands while the battle still raged. Second, because editors wished not only to be the first to announce the battle but also to declare it a victory, they were tempted to embellish the war correspondent’s already suspect account of the fight. Psychologists Gordon Allport and Leo Postman noted this tendency: “the ‘news’ has already become hearsay, and what the reporter writes and copywriter revises may slip further down the precarious road of leveling, sharpening, and assimilation.” Sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani concurred, “too much material is made available by the wire services, and each editor must choose which items to include. There is often no time to verify suspicious items, and the temptation to present a ‘good story’ is difficult to resist.” This process explains how battles as devastating as Gettysburg first appeared as Confederate triumphs in southern newspapers.44

Wartime shortages of paper compounded the problem. Hundreds of Confederate presses printed fewer pages, fewer issues, or closed altogether. In Vicksburg, Mississippi, one editor used flowered wallpaper to stay in print. But paper shortages liberated editors
as well, because newsmen could report the stories they preferred and omit the rest for lack of space. With so many positive rumors in the air, the Confederate media could fill papers with good news. Tamotsu Shibutani discovered similar circumstances in Paris at the end of World War II. In 1945 every city newspaper was restricted to two pages and many of them falsely reported German capitulation again and again. Shibutani explained, "this is not fabrication; an effort is made to create the desired impression through the omission of inconvenient items, the selection of details, and the preferential placement—‘featuring’ some items and ‘burying’ others.” Of course, Rebel papers still detailed setbacks and catastrophes, but editors also found space for positive rumors that supported their own hopes for the struggle. Barraged with information and scraping to stay in print, southern editors sometimes “slanted” the news to please themselves and their readers.45

A popular rumor in October 1864 illustrates how editors’ eagerness to print optimistic news could affect soldiers’ perceptions of the war. Throughout that month, the Army of Tennessee harassed Sherman’s supply line in hopes of forcing the Federals out of Atlanta. They failed. Union soldiers pushed Hood’s men into Alabama, repaired the railroad, and embarked on the March to the Sea. Nevertheless, in mid October Richmond newsmen desperately sought good news and thought they found some. A preliminary (and false) report claimed that Hood’s army had achieved a victory against Sherman in one of these brief engagements along the supply line. The news was too lean and ambiguous for even the editors to embellish, so Richmond papers informed their readers that the news from Georgia was too good to print. They insinuated that Sherman’s army was completely cut off from the North and claimed that reporting the invaders’ fate in
Confederate papers would give Lincoln and Grant information that they could not gather otherwise.46

Confederates defending Richmond and Petersburg accepted this nonsense and sent word to their loved ones. Spencer Welch wrote his wife that "there is encouraging news from Georgia, but they will not tell us what it is, because they say they do not want Grant to find out about it." He conjectured that "Hood may have Sherman in a tight place." On the same day, John McLure exclaimed, "there are rumors afloat about Richmond that matters are going on most prosperously in Georgia, the news is too good they say to be published to the Yankees just yet, which would be the effect of publishing in our papers, now the only mode the enemy have of ascertaining what has become of Sherman's army. I truly hope when the veil is torn away our expectations may not be disappointed." David Crawford was still hopeful over a week later. "From newspaper accounts," he reported that "Hood seems to have Sherman in a pretty tight fix, I hope he may be able to put an end to that 'great General of the day.' & his army with him."47

Similar biases marked the Confederacy’s religious presses. Throughout the war, Christian organizations dispatched millions of newsletters and pamphlets to Rebel armies. According to historian Kurt Berends, the editors of these papers "created a framework of beliefs—a worldview—that sustained an unvanquished optimism for southern independence." It seems nothing could shake their confidence in ultimate victory. After the fall of Atlanta, one editor argued "there was no disaster," because General Hood's "great object was to hold it as long as he could, and to make the possession of it by the enemy cost him as much as possible. This object has been fully attained." In February 1865 another editor reasoned that "the loss of our great cities is
probable. This occurred in the Revolutionary war, and occurs in most wars; but if the heart of the people is right, never determines the result.” When Richmond fell, southern columnists again compared their circumstances to Americans during the Revolution: “the taking of Richmond will have no more effect upon the final result of the war than the taking of Philadelphia, (the Capital of the Colonies) in 1777.” William Norris, editor of the Mississippi Messenger, penned perhaps the most astounding report on March 16, 1865, less than a month before Lee’s surrender. Norris’s claim that “the war shall be either closed, or its character entirely changed” within three months was not exceptional, except that he expected Confederate victory to be the result. Norris contended that Generals Grant and George Thomas “have been whipped so often that we need not take them into the calculation. In South Carolina, Sherman is confronted by an equal force with all the natural advantage on our side. Let Sherman be destroyed, and the supremacy of the Confederacy is established.” “There is no reason for despondency, just the reverse,” Norris concluded, for “the Confederacy controls the whole situation.”

When Rebels swapped papers with enemy pickets, they wrongly assumed that northern coverage of the war provided them an unfiltered glimpse of Federal morale. In general, the troops misused their ability to read enemy material. First, Confederates only believed Union news that conformed to their perceptions of the war. They accepted Yankee reports of Federal setbacks as facts and dismissed the enemy’s positive news as propaganda. Second, most Confederates failed to understand that every northern editor had an agenda during the election year. Most northern stories of internal unrest and imminent collapse came from the desks of Copperhead editors or Radical Republicans working to stop Lincoln’s re-election. Third, northern editors like their southern
counterparts sensationalized reports in order to sell newspapers. The competition for readers was intense because of the sheer number of northern presses—New York City alone supported seventeen dailies—so the media competed by offering more provocative news to a wider audience. In the West, another bias affected newspapers. In antebellum decades, western editors had started as political and commercial “boosters” for towns like Cincinnati, Chicago, and Milwaukee before the cities had permanent buildings. In other words, these men were accustomed to writing what could or should be the news rather than the facts. Or as one editor put it, he “sometimes represented things that had not yet gone through the formality of taking place.” Though the media admitted these influences, many Confederates still considered Yankee editors to be authorities on the enemy’s problems.49

Confederate leaders contributed to troops’ warped perceptions. No politician encouraged Rebels’ conviction that they were unconquerable as strongly as Jefferson Davis did. When the Confederate Congress assembled in May 1864, days before the spring campaigns began, Davis promised the statesmen, “if our arms are crowned with the success which we have so much reason to hope, we may well expect that this war cannot be prolonged beyond the current year.” Praising the troops for “exhibiting energy and vigilance with the habitual gallantry,” Davis summarized the Confederacy’s military gains thus far in 1864:

We have been cheered by important and valuable successes in Florida, Northern Mississippi, Western Tennessee and Kentucky, Western Louisiana and Eastern North Carolina. . . . A naval attack on Mobile was so successfully repulsed at the outer works that the attempt was abandoned, and the nine months’ siege of Charleston has been practically suspended. . . . The armies in Northern Georgia and in Northern Virginia still oppose with unshaken front a formidable barrier to the progress of the invader;
and our generals, armies and people are animated by cheerful confidence.

On the eve of Lincoln’s re-election, Davis argued that nothing could deny the Rebels ultimate victory and independence:

There are no vital points on the preservation of which the continued existence of the Confederacy depends. There is no military success of the enemy which can accomplish its destruction. Not the fall of Richmond, nor Wilmington, nor Charleston, nor Savannah, nor Mobile, nor of all combined, can save the enemy from the constant and exhaustive drain of blood and treasure which must continue until he shall discover that no peace is attainable unless based on recognition of our indefeasible rights.

Davis went on to discuss foreign intervention, finances and the unlikelihood of a negotiated peace with the Union until “the delusion of their ability to conquer us is dispelled.” The only course to victory he identified was through persistent fighting: “Let us, resolutely continue to devote our united and unimpaired energies to the defense of our homes, our lives, and our liberties. This is true path to peace. Let us tread it with confidence in the assured result.” Throughout the lengthy speech Davis completely ignored tomorrow’s Federal election and its impact on the Rebellion.50

Clergymen also supported continued resistance and hopes for a northern collapse. Church leaders decried Lincoln’s despotism, predicted financial catastrophe on Wall Street, hinted that masses of wretched northerners faced starvation, and labeled the Yankee press a gigantic propaganda machine that controlled a docile public. In April 1864 Episcopal bishop Stephen Elliott argued that Federal armies were not permanently occupying any vital Confederate territory and mocked the enemy’s annual advance and retreat in Virginia and Tennessee. He asked his congregation, “will the people of the United States consent to be maimed and slaughtered through an infinite series of years for the annual honor of marching from Washington to the Rappahannock, and from
Nashville to Chattanooga? Impossible!" Considering the reverence thousands of Rebels accorded to sacred leaders, these pronouncements bolstered faith in victory and independence in profound ways.\textsuperscript{51}

In addition to false news and leaders who encouraged optimistic assessments, the soldiers themselves spread wishful rumors. Many elements within the troops’ environment encouraged this behavior. Rebels used rumors as problem-solving and cathartic responses to every day conditions. In other words, whether bogus reports within the ranks were conscious fabrications or not misses the bigger point that rumors were popular and influential because they provided the men with both intellectual and emotional assurances. Any news aided the soldiers’ quest for meaning within a confusing, confining, and deadly world.\textsuperscript{52}

The uncertainty and mortal danger of army life encouraged rumors. Unable to control where or when the next battle would be fought, soldiers sought military information that impacted their very lives. But grand strategy was too important to trust to the discretion of thousands who wrote uncensored letters to every corner of the South. Rumors compensated for scant knowledge and relieved troops’ anxiety over the future. John Walters recorded how the atmosphere of insecurity affected his unit while it waited to fight at the Wilderness, the first battle of the 1864 Virginia campaign. After anticipating combat for months in winter camp, the men were called to the front before daylight and waited, hunkered together, within earshot of the raging struggle. Empty ambulances passed them and shortly returned loaded with the wounded. To distract himself Walters collected rumors that swirled through the ranks and commented on their validity:
The first was, that on yesterday, Ewell on our left had had a very severe engagement with the enemy. They attacked him with seven lines of battle, but they were repulsed with great loss, though his own was very heavy. He captured some say two, some three, and others four thousand prisoners, together with several guns. As near as I can ascertain, he took some fifteen or eighteen hundred men and no guns. Not long after it was reported that Pickett was on his way up with his division via Fredericksburg. Several days after I learned that Pickett had not yet left Petersburg. About an hour after, we were somewhat startled by the news that Beauregard with some twenty thousand men was on his way up from North Carolina. This proved to be true, though he remained with his force around Richmond. On the heels of this came the news that Hampton with his division of cavalry was making the circuit of the Yankee army to destroy a portion of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad in their rear. All these reports admitted of and received much discussion, and it is a great pity that General Lee could not hear and thus profit by the admirable plans of battle which some of our military types drew up under the inspiration of the moment.

This list was only a fraction of the reports Walters transcribed, but it illustrates how men tried to grasp battles that enveloped them. It is telling that Walters’ comrades drew up “admirable plans” for the engagement—they compensated for their lack of control over events by telling each other how they would command the scene. In the summer months suspenseful waiting became an every-day activity as the adversaries settled into prolonged trench warfare. For the rest of the war in Virginia, the enemy’s activities were often heard but seldom seen. Any moment could erupt with fire.53

If troops faced an insecure future, their present often seemed incomprehensible. Whether in combat, on the march, or at camp, soldiers lived in a confined environment—few secrets existed within the company but ambiguities pervaded the outer world. Confederates pined for knowledge that mattered most, particularly news from home and other theaters, and they vented exasperation for not receiving enough correspondence from loved ones. From his hole in Petersburg, Paul Higginbotham pleaded to his brother,
“write soon and a long newsy letter.” Higginbotham was trying to make sense of the presidential election, Grant’s plans, and reports that Federal cavalry threatened his family. Because comrades often came from the same county, they collected and circulated letters in an attempt to piece together the situation at home. Using newspapers, speeches, and military orders, troops similarly constructed a picture of the Confederacy’s fortunes in other campaigns. But the distances that veiled far-off places and events also obscured facts from fictions. Tamotsu Shibutani appreciated this issue when he defined rumor as “a recurrent form of communication through which men caught together in an ambiguous situation attempt to construct a meaningful interpretation of it by pooling their intellectual resources.” In short, because physical boundaries and unreliable channels often denied Rebels accurate intelligence about the subjects that interested them most, soldiers who gathered and shared information were spreading rumors.54

These obstacles plagued troops in the Trans-Mississippi Department. Hundreds of miles from the decisive battles in Georgia and Virginia, soldiers in the West collected and traded rumors as if they were currency. When the 1864 campaigns began across the river, William Heartsill was stuck guarding a temporary prison camp in Tyler, Texas. One day, perhaps out of sheer boredom, he critiqued some rumors that had infiltrated the stockade:

The Stage comes in overloaded with news, and as a specimen of what RELIABLE! persons are bringing over, I will give a few samples of the latest to day; No 1 Lee and Grant has had a fight, and Lee has taken from eight to fifteen thousand prisoners. No 2, Johnston has possession of Lookout mountain, and the enemy is evacuating Chattanooga. No 3, Morgan is recruiting in Kentucky, and has eight thousand men. No 4, Forrest has taken Memphis. No 5, Genl Ross has taken Snyders Bluff and eight thousand prisoners, 5000 white and 3000 blacks. No 6, 17 thousand Negroes are now garrisoning Vicksburg, and have offered to surrender the place if they be allowed to return to their former masters. No 8, Kentucky has refused to furnish any more troops to the U S Army.
No 9, The Federal Congress has taken the vote direct, upon the recognition of the Confederate States, and the resolution was lost by only SEVEN votes. No 10, Lee’s Army now number TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTY THOUSAND MEN FIT FOR DUTY. Was there ever TEN as BIG LIES told in one day?

While Heartsill mocked such news, others accepted it as fact. In October 1864 Hugh Montgomery, an officer stationed in Shreveport, Louisiana, told a friend that “the news to day is without exaggeration magnificent we have slaughtered the enemy before our ranks around Petersburg & Richmond.” As he understood the report, the Confederates allowed the enemy to seize the first trench and “then opened on them with small arms, light artillery & from our gunboats in the James. It is said such destruction of human life has never been witnessed during our struggle.” Because of this and “other news, good, gratifying & glorious for Southern arms,” Montgomery hoped that such events “will rouse the dispondent of our land and be hailed with joy and gladness by those of us whose hope, and confidence of victory & independence has not been lost by the temporary gloom.”

These conditions elaborate why hearsay spread among anxious groups of men seeking the same news from distant places, but why were Confederate rumors so positive? Fear and hatred can spark the imagination and produce rumors as easily as hopes can. Sociologists who collected American rumors during World War II concluded that only two percent of all the gossip reflected peoples’ wishes. Sixty-six percent criticized the war effort, including racist rumors and suspicions about government activity and big business. Twenty-five percent expressed people’s fears, such as reports of biological warfare or secret enemy plans. Why didn’t chatter about catastrophic defeats, enemy espionage, slave revolts, or starvation on the homefront swirl through
Confederate camps as the war worsened? Some negative gossip did exist. Atrocity stories followed Sherman's tracks, and news occasionally announced the death of Lee or some other cherished leader, but wishful rumors outweighed despondent ones.\textsuperscript{56}

The phenomenon can be explained in part by soldiers' efforts to construct reality. When Rebels received news that threatened the very existence of the Confederacy, such as the fall of Atlanta, many of them first denied the reports and then spread positive rumors to counterbalance the disaster's impact. According to psychologist Leon Festinger, when social groups face undeniable evidence that challenges how they view themselves or foresee their future, they often band together to discuss the news and through this discourse produce rumors that support their cherished beliefs. In this manner, "a large group of people is able to maintain an opinion or belief even in the face of continual definite evidence to the contrary." Thousands of Rebels committed to independence and living in uncertain times, managed to deflect the significance of successive defeats and worsening conditions by unconsciously inventing good news. Such behavior could be termed mass delusional, but it is not uncommon. Historian Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts involves the same dynamic. Kuhn has argued that scientists sometimes retain theories when increasing evidence discredits those premises, because the older beliefs explain the universe. Instead of jettisoning how they perceive the world, scientists label contradictory facts as anomalies until those findings grow to dimensions that cannot be ignored. When Confederates classified bad news as northern propaganda or temporary setbacks they acted in similar ways.\textsuperscript{57}

Most soldiers questioned the validity of rumors but still circulated them, because hopeful messages were too appealing to discard. Though Grant Taylor complained, "we
hear so many lies we never know what to believe,” he spread a report that northern
prisoners were taking the Confederate oath and joining Rebel armies. Paul Higginbotham
remarked that newspapers “are now, as they always do, making out our prospects bright,
but I believe as much of their talk as I please.” Nevertheless Higginbotham frequently
shared northern reports that bolstered his morale. Soldiers often concluded the telling of a
rumor by doubting its accuracy. Statements like, “it seems too good to believe,” “if true
this is glorious,” “if that be so,” and “I hope it is true,” reveal the tug-of-war between
soldiers’ intellects and passions. As veterans, they knew how ridiculous some of these
rumors sounded. But as partisans, they could not deny the emotions that good news
summoned: pride, hope, anticipation, and even revenge. Charles Blackford exemplified
this internal debate. In the same letter in which he told his wife that “bad rumors are
always true while good ones are often false,” he could not resist sharing the rumor that
Grant had been killed in the last battle.58

Finally, as Virgil noted in The Aeneid, rumors are “stronger for the running”—
they gain momentum with each telling. As the war worsened, positive reports continued
to circulated the South. Soldiers who doubted the gossip they spread contributed
information that convinced others the Rebellion would prevail. Over time even stalwart
skeptics succumbed to the accumulated force of good news. When enough comrades,
officers, politicians, clergymen, loved ones and even enemies told them the Confederacy
would succeed, many veterans accepted notions they had always wanted to believe: that
their armies and people were unconquerable and everything would turn out right in the
end.

2 Samuel Horace Hawes Diary, 18 October 1864, VHS.

3 George Rable has argued that “rationalizations and wishful thinking helped citizens hang onto hope even in the absence of any tangible reasons to do so.” I agree that wishful thinking affected how Rebels interpreted their news. I disagree with the assertion that Confederates lacked any tangible evidence to bolster morale. If Confederates believed a rumor it was tangible to them, even if it isn’t to historians today. Besides this, there was plenty of tangible evidence to sustain hope. Every tactical success was tangible; every Copperhead was tangible; every disaffected Union prisoner or deserter (see Chapter 3) was tangible. Rable, “Despair, Hope, and Delusion: The Collapse of Confederate Morale Reexamined,” in Mark Grimsley and Brooks D. Simpson, eds., *The Collapse of the Confederacy* (Lincoln and London, 2001), 131.


6 Henry Orr to his father, 10 July 1864, in John Q. Anderson, ed., *Campaigning with Parsons’ Texas Cavalry Brigade, CSA; The War Journals and Letters of the Four Orr Brothers, 12th Texas Cavalry Regiment* (Hillsboro, Tex., 1967), 142; James Orr to his mother, 18 July 1864, in ibid., James Bates to his mother and sister, 8 July 1864, in Richard Lowe, ed., *A Texas Cavalry Officer’s Civil War: The Diary and Letters of James C. Bates* (Baton Rouge, 1999), 305. For another soldier’s report of the rumor that Grant was killed, see John William McLure to his wife, “Kate,” date uncertain but must be late July 1864, McLure Family Papers, USC.


8 John William McLure to his wife “Kate” (Jane Catherine Poulton McLure), 2 July 1864, McLure Family Papers, USC; T. N. Dawkins to John William McLure, 31 July 1864, McLure Family Papers, USC.
9 Creed Thomas Davis diary, 8 July 1864, VHS; John Walters diary, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 135; T. N. Dawkins to John William McLure, 31 July 1864, McLure Family Papers, USC.


11 Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 1 August 1864, Paul Higginbotham Letters, VHS; Edwin Fay to Sarah Shields Fay, 22 August 1864, in Wiley, ed., "This Infernal War," 402.

12 Creed Thomas Davis diary, 6 September 1864, VHS; William W. Heartsill diary, 12 September 1864, 18-19 October 1864, in Bell Irvin Wiley, ed., Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army (Jackson, Tenn., 1954), 217 (second quotation), 221.


14 Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 5 December 1864 (first quotation), 18, 19 December 1864 (second quotation), 26 December 1864 (third quotation), 30 December 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT.

15 Edward Crenshaw diary, 19 December 1864, 1 January 1865, in Edward Crenshaw, "Diary of Captain Edward Crenshaw," Alabama Historical Review, 2 (Fall 1940), 365 (fourth quotation), 370 (seventh quotation); Thomas Goree to Robert Daniel Goree, 18 December 1864, in Cutrer, ed., Longstreet's Aide, 141; Hugh Montgomery to Arthur W. Hyatt, 27 December 1864, Arthur W. Hyatt Papers, LSU.

16 Thomas Goree to his mother, Sarah Williams Kittrell Goree, 26 April 1864, in Cutrer, ed., Longstreet's Aide, 123.


23 John Walters diary, 5 July 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 131; Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 10 July 1864, 14 July 1864 (second and third quotations), Paul Higginbotham Letters, VHS; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 13 July 1864, VHS; Giles Buckner Cooke diary, 1864–1865, 14 July 11864, VHS; James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 17 July 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS; James Orr to his mother, 18 July 1864, in Anderson, ed., Campaigning with Parsons' Texas Cavalry Brigade, C.S.A., 143; Edward Crenshaw diary, 14 July 1864, in Crenshaw, "Diary of Captain Edward Crenshaw," 452.

24 McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 757.

25 This is not to say that Rebels lost hope of winning on their own front. Troops' hopeful perceptions of their own campaigns are treated in chapter four.

26 John Walters diary, 4 August 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 141. In all the letters and diaries examined for this work, I only uncovered two instances when soldiers admitted the strength of northern commitment and the health of the Federal economy. In January 1864 Edwin Fay speculated on the chance of a financial collapse on Wall Street and conceded that the enemy "have proved themselves far more able financiers than we." See Edwin Fay to Sarah Shields Fay, 9 January 1864, in Wiley, ed., "This Infernal War," 385. In September 1864 William Nugent wrote, "the spirit and unanimity still manifested by the North on the subject of the war is an unfavorable omen." See William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 26 September 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., My Dear Nellie, 209–10. Considering the Confederacy's own financial woes and internal strife, this dearth of accurate assessments of enemy strengths is remarkable.


28 Hugh W. Montgomery to Arthur W. Hyatt, 25 May 1864, in Arthur W. Hyatt Papers, LSU; Stephen Elliott, "Gideon's Water-Lappers." [4143] (Macon, Ga., 1864), 9; Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 10 July 1864, Paul Higginbotham Letters, VHS.


30 Edwin Fay to Sarah Shields Fay, 9 January 1864, in Wiley, ed., "This Infernal War," 385; Sunday Mercury quoted in Nelson, Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric, 10; James Orr to


33 Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 29 August 1864, Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS; John Walters diary, 29 August 1864, in Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 149; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 30 August 1864, VHS. Larry Nelson observed that “Confederate hopes for an immediate and favorable consummation of the war escalated to dizzy heights in August.” See Nelson, *Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric*, 85.

34 Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 4 September 1864, Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS; William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 10 September 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., *My Dear Nellie*, 203; John Walters diary, 31 August 1864, in Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 149. Walters anticipated the impact the fall of Atlanta would have on the election. He wrote, “I fear it will have a great effect upon the November election in the North, and that not all to our benefit, unless between now and ten we can make a strike here with our army.” See his 4 September 1864 entry in *ibid.*, 150.

35 John Walters diary, 16 September 1864, in *ibid.*, 155; William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 14 September 1864 (first quotation), 17 September 1864 (second quotation), 2 August 1864 (third quotation), in Cash and Howorth, eds., *My Dear Nellie*, 206, 207–08, 193–94; James Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 12 September 1864, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS. After McClellan’s speech, Peter Guerrant admitted he could not decide between the candidates, but he seemed to lean towards Lincoln: “on the one hand I believe we [might] just as well have Lincoln, as he has already done us as much harm as he can, on the other I believe McClellan would not be so mean a man as Lincoln, yet I believe he (should he be elected) would rally more recruits than Lincoln.” Peter Guerrant to his uncle, William Waddy Anderson, 9 October 1864, Guerrant Family Papers, VHS. Charles Blackford was also ambivalent. See, Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 16 June 1864, in Susan Leigh Blackford


38 Lawrence Ross to Lizzie Ross, 19 March 1864, in Perry Wayne Shelton and Shelly Morrison, eds., *Personal Civil War Letters of General Lawrence Sullivan Ross; With Other Letters* (Austin, Tx., 1994), 62; William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 20 March 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., *My Dear Nellie*, 162; Thomas Key diary, 1 January 1864, in Cate, ed., *Two Soldiers*, 22; William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 26 January 1865, in *ibid.*, 234–35. Jared Sanders heard the same rumors in Louisiana. See Jared Sanders to Bessie Sanders, 16 January 1864, Jared Y. Sanders and Family Papers, LSU. Interestingly, Junius Bragg thought rumors of foreign intervention were lies started by the enemy: “they love to make us feel good once in a while, and it is really quite clever of them.” See Junius Newport Bragg to Anna Josephine Goddard, 18 January 1864, in Gaughan, *Letters of a Confederate Surgeon*, 62.


40 Thomas Elder to Anna Fitzhugh (May) Elder, 11 July 1864, Thomas Claybrook Elder Papers, VHS; John Walters diary, 10 July 1864, in Wiley, ed., *Norfolk Blues*, 133.

41 William Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 2 August 1864, in Cash and Howorth, eds., *My Dear Nellie*, 193. James McPherson argues that Unionists missed the importance of Mobile as well: “the dimensions of [Admiral David] Farragut’s victory were more apparent to the North in retrospect than in August, when so much dismal attention was focused on the apparent lack of progress in Virginia and Georgia.” McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 761.

Carolina Historical Review, 58 (1981), 327–63; Paul Escott, After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism (Baton Rouge and London, 1978), 194, 207. Many Confederates also misjudged the Copperheads’ position, because the Rebels failed to comprehend that these Democrats sought peace with reunion and opposed Confederate independence as strongly as Republicans did. As noted earlier, when the Chicago Convention nominated McClellan, a Union man, with a peace platform, many graybacks were so discouraged or confused that they switched to favoring Lincoln.


45 Shibutani, Improvised News, 44. Allport and Postman add that false reports of peace can also be explained by competing papers trying to print the big story first. See, Allport and Postman, Psychology of Rumor, 8–9.

46 McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 808.

47 Spencer Welch to Cordelia Strother Welch, 12 October 1864, in Welch, A Confederate Surgeon’s Letters to His Wife, 108; John William McLure to his wife “Kate,” Jane Catherine Poulton McLure, 12 October 1864, McLure Family Papers, USC; David Crawford to mother, Isabella Crawford, 23 October 1864, Crawford Family Papers, USC.

48 Kurt O. Berends, “‘Wholesome Reading Purifies and Elevates the Man’: The Religious Military Press in the Confederacy,” in Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., Religion and the American Civil War (New York and Oxford, 1998), 131 (first quotation), 149 (second, third, fourth, and fifth quotations), 148 (sixth, seventh, and eighth quotations). Berends explanation for positive reporting in the Religious Military Press (RMP) is similar to the argument of this dissertation: “Since the Confederacy lost, the optimism and bravado may seem misplaced as if editors had held onto a cause long lost. This interpretation has driven some historians, but it is mistaken; for the writers of the RMP, such optimism was the logical conclusion to their whole message.” See ibid., 131–32.

49 Editor quoted in Boorstin, The Americans: The National Experience, 127; Harris, Blue & Gray in Black & White, 9.

50 Davis’s 2 May 1864 address quoted in Lynda Lasswell Crist, ed., The Papers of Jefferson Davis v. 10 (Baton Rouge, 1999), 381 (first quotation), 382–83 (second and
third quotations); Davis’s 7 November 1864 address quoted in Foote, Civil War, v. 3, 624.

51 James W. Silver, Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1957), 90; Stephen Elliott, Gideon’s Water-Lappers [4143] (Macon, Ga., 1864), 9.

52 Previous chapters have explored how Confederates’ faith in victory was often a product of their quest for meaning and justification within the bewildering universe of war. In Chapter Two, the belief in providential deliverance justified troops’ sacrifices by promising them that God would protect them personally and shield the Confederacy from capitulation. In Chapter Three, stereotypes of the enemy justified killing and assured Rebels that the North was either too evil or too inept to win the struggle. In Chapter Four, tactical gains, enemy casualties, and continued perseverance convinced thousands of Confederates that they belonged to indestructible veteran armies that embodied their nation and would fulfill its cause.

53 John Walters diary, 6 May 1864, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 113–14. Vernon Scannell, a British soldier in World War II offered a fine comparison in his memoirs when he discussed the rumors that flourished in camp while his unit waited to begin the Normandy invasion: “fresh rumors were floated almost daily: The battalion was going to be converted to airborne; it was going to move up to Scotland; there had been a rape in the village; General Eisenhower was coming to inspect them; the . . . Division was going to be used as a diversionary assault force on D-Day and it has been written off as totally expendable; the Germans had a secret weapon that would destroy the entire invasion force; Hitler has been assassinated; . . . Churchill was coming to inspect the battalion; the Germans were about to surrender; the battalion was moving to Kent. This last one proved to be true.” According to Scannell, the environment that fostered these reports was replete with “boredom, cold, exhaustion, squalor, lack of privacy, monotony, ugliness and a constant teasing anxiety about the future.” Quoted in Paul Fussell, Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War (New York and Oxford, 1989), 41. Also see, Shibutani, Improvised News, 39; Leeds, No Man’s Land: Combat & Identity in World War I (Cambridge, Eng. and other cities, 1979), 128; and Allport and Postman, Psychology of Rumor, 7–8, 31, 34.

54 Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, 1 August 1864, Paul Higginbotham Letters, VHS; Shibutani, Improvised News, 17. For the more on distance and rumors in wartime, see Fussell, Wartime, 38; and Allport and Postman, Psychology of Rumor, 184.

55 William Heartsill diary, 5 May 1864, in Wiley, ed., Four Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army, 202–3; Hugh Montgomery to Arthur Hyatt, 14 October 1864, Arthur W. Hyatt Papers, LSU. Of course, soldiers who suffered most from the affects of distance and a confined world were not prison guards but prisoners themselves. For examples of how rumors affected prisoners’ perceptions of the war, see Ruth Woods Dayton, ed., The Diary of a Confederate Soldier: James E. Hall (privately published, 1961).
Allport and Postman, *Psychology of Rumor*, 12. The final seven percent of the rumors gathered were classified as miscellaneous. It’s worth noting that this study was done during the summer of 1942, a low point in American progress and morale. Still, circumstances were not as critical then as they were for Rebels in 1864–1865. Moreover, Allport and Postman observed that “on the whole, wish rumors, with their characteristically optimistic coloring, were relatively few until the collapse of Germany was imminent” (p. 8).


Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 29 December 1864, in Blomquist and Taylor, eds., *This Cruel War*, 319; Paul Higginbotham to Aaron Higginbotham, Paul Higginbotham Letters, VHS; Henry Orr to his father, 10 July 1864, in Anderson, ed., *Campaigning with Parsons’ Texas Cavalry Brigade, CSA*, 142 (second quotation); Edwin Fay to Sarah Shields Fay, 22 August 1864, in Wiley, ed., “*This Infernal War,*” 402 (third quotation); Lafayette Orr to his brothers, Henry and Robert Orr, 30 April 1864, in Anderson, ed., *Campaigning with Parsons’ Texas Cavalry Brigade, CSA*, 136 (fourth quotation); Thomas Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 18 December 1864, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT (fifth quotation); Charles Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 17 July 1864, in Susan Leigh Blackford and Charles Minor Blackford III, eds., *Letters from Lee’s Army: Or Memoirs of Life In and Out of the Army in Virginia During the War Between the States* (Lincoln, Neb., and London, 1998), 267.
Chapter Six

The Face of Surrender: Confederate Soldiers in 1865

"We are all well & getting on tolerably especially my self who as always looks things in the face hopefully & firmly believing that all will end well." Blair Burwell to his wife, 8 April 1865, the day before his surrender.¹

Confederate Conditions Versus Expectations

As 1865 started, Confederate soldiers had countless reasons to despond of ultimate success. Their military situation looked desperate. In Virginia, General Robert E. Lee’s veterans faced twice their number along a tenuous defensive line between Richmond and Petersburg. In Mississippi, General John Bell Hood’s troops recuperated from a disastrous campaign into Tennessee that not only annihilated their ranks but left General William Sherman and his invading army free to wreak central Georgia and capture Savannah. In the western Confederacy, Rebel commanders not only failed to coordinate a campaign that might have relieved their eastern comrades but refused to send inactive troops across the Mississippi. Worse still, Federal forces threatened the Confederacy’s last, vital cities, including Richmond, Mobile, Charleston, and Wilmington. If these final bastions and harbors fell, the Rebellion would likely become a fugitive government and a guerrilla army within its own borders.

Civilian affairs offered less hope. The economy was beyond repair. State and local officials hoarded supplies that were intended for the soldiers. Instead of concentrating on food production, many planters smuggled cotton to Federal agents and Mexican traders. Rumors spread that secret Unionist organizations were proliferating throughout the Confederacy. Even worse, bands of Rebel deserters fought the home guards and militiamen who chased them. These bushwhackers thrived in a virtually
lawless society and preyed on helpless civilians of every stripe. Available labor was
disintegrating. Slaves left by the thousands for Union lines, and planters who still held
some people refused to loan them to the government. Instead of solving these problems,
most politicians and the media sought a scapegoat and targeted Jefferson Davis. The
spirit of 1861 had flashed and died like a meteor.

Though we cannot assume that every soldier foresaw the implications of all these
events, we know that many troops had not received pay, a furlough, or adequate food and
clothing for months or even years. Thousands of soldiers responded by deserting. But
thousands more stayed in the ranks until the bitter end. While their persistence alone is
remarkable, the fact that some of these diehards refused to lose faith in victory defies
logic and contradicts what many historians have written about the waning Confederacy.
Lieutenant J. W. Hardie in Shreveport, Louisiana, exemplified this indomitable spirit in
January 1865:

I am sorry to see you “down in the mouth.” a “stiff upper lip, & a
tight behind” and all’s well. I have full confidence in the skill and
ability of Lee, Beauregard, Hardie, and Hood. You may expect
better news than we have heard. What if Richmond falls? She has
played the grandest “role” recorded in ancient or modern times. The
combined wealth and resources of the whole Yankee Nation, have
dashed against her in vain, and she stands today, proud, defiant, and
firm as the eternal hills! I have no fears for the Cis-Miss. Dept [the
eastern Confederacy]. Let us be grateful to the gallant spirits whose
valor and devotion have rolled back the tide, of invasion, driven
Thomas beyond the Tennessee, Sherman to the Atlantic coast, & held
Grant, within his entrenchments around Richmond. God with us. Who
shall harm us?

The fact that Hardie could interpret Sherman’s march to the sea as a retreat forced by
Confederate troops illustrates that the war looked differently to its participants, especially
when they strove to sustain hope in their darkest days. In the end, the warped perceptions
of men like Hardie complicate historians’ portrait of the Confederacy but illuminate why
wars seldom end when the outcome is certain.²

_The Final Months of War: January–March 1865_

As 1865 dawned, news of General John Bell Hood’s disaster in Tennessee and the
fall of Savannah to General William Sherman’s columns left a pall over the Confederacy.
In Alexandria, Louisiana, David Pierson called the news “the worst of the war” and noted
how the populace seemed to exude gloom and even despair. “Men of sense and position
were freely talking on the streets of our being whipped. Such has never been the case
before, and it clearly shows the ominous state of affairs.” From Petersburg Ham
Chamberlayne wrote that the “publick mind [is] in a gloomy state here—We must pas
thro’ a great crisis before Spring. Much to be done & suffered.” Edgeworth Bird called it
“a general tone of depression” and admitted that “the affairs of our country are in a rather
gloomy condition.” He observed that the people “have lost confidence in the ability of the
chief magistrate, and all sorts of opinions are afloat as to what is best to be done.”
Seeking explanations and a release from their frustrations, citizens were branding
Jefferson Davis the scapegoat. Though “every thing looks gloomy, and every one seems
to be low-spirited,” Edward Crenshaw thought the criticism of Davis was severe and
unjust. J. M. Bonner of Louisiana disagreed. If “the Confederacy should fail what would
be the verdict of posterity on the subject,” he asked. “Simply this ‘Died of the effects of
the prejudices of Jefferson Davis.’” Remarking that “this is no time for experiments,”
Bonner blamed Davis for replacing General Joe Johnston with “an untried man like
Hood.”³
As Bonner’s comments suggest, many soldiers not only observed the prevailing gloom but took part in it. David Pierson wrote home that “we are in a bad fix and everybody knows and feels it. If something is not done, and that speedily, all must be lost.” In South Carolina, John Cotton admitted that “it looks like the yankeys has got the upperhand of us I would like to here some terms of peace before they run clear over us.” He expected Sherman would take Charleston “without a fite,” because “our soldiers are very much disheartened and the most of them say we are all whipped.” He even heard “that georgia is holding conventions to no whether to go back in the union or not if she goes back it will look like rest will have to go two I hate the thoughts of going back but if we have to do it the sooner the better I have suffered two much in this war to ever go back to the union willingly.” Virginian Henry Berkeley concurred that the “men’s spirits [are] dull, gloomy and all are evidently hopeless, waiting for we know not what end.” When a female relative called Confederates troops who wavered “white-livered men, cowards, etc.,” Berkeley imagined “how she would face a Yankee battery and a Yankee brigade.” “I don’t think our people realize how near the end is on us, or what that end will most probably be.” “Our cause is hopeless,” Berkeley declared, and “I wonder if I shall ever see home and the loved ones there again.” Creed Thomas Davis confided in his diary that he “spent a dismal day, Closeted with, and fostering dark thoughts.” “I am unhappy and scarcely know what to do,” Davis cried. “The war continues and misery is on the increase.” He wrote that Hell awaited “the Southern people” and then crossed out the line. Some thoughts were too dark for print.⁴

Gloom and war weariness compelled thousands of Confederates to desert in 1865. Some of these troops headed home in January and February with the intention of
returning to the ranks in the spring. Grant Taylor shared such plans with his wife: “I will write you a secret which I want you to keep. . . . If I live God being my helper I intend to come home next April if I do not get a furlough before then and they do not pay me off. . . . Unless you think I had better stay and bide my time for a furlough. But I do not think I can start into another summer’s campaign without seeing you and the children.” Taylor planned to go home not because he lost all hope of winning the war or because his family needed him, but because he thought the war was far from over, and he could not face another long campaign without first seeing his loved ones. When his unit transferred from Mobile to South Carolina, Taylor was too far from home to execute his plans unless he deserted and he could not do that: “now all hope is snatched away only in deserting and I cannot bear the idea of that yet although we are treated like dogs.”

But many Confederates desert in early 1865 and never looked back. Thousands who tired of the war crossed over to Union lines, and thousands more returned home to help destitute loved ones. In Virginia, Creed Thomas Davis noted that “our men . . . are deserting to the enemy by the wholesale.” Peter Guerrant reported that “twelve of our Battalion have deserted & gone to the Yankees within the last ten days. From Tupelo, Mississippi, James Orr wrote his younger brother, Sammie: “the boys is very much dissatisfied. I think a good many of them will desert between now and spring; some are leaving every knight.” He told Sammie, “if you should ever have to go into the service, let me advise you to go into the cavelry service; they are what we call life-insured companys.” Orr wearied of hard service and high casualties in the infantry: “about the time I become skilled in ditching [trenches], the Yankeys shot and disabled me. . . . This thing what they call chargin brest works is not the thing it is cracked up to be. It is very
unhealthy.” All wars test human endurance, and many Rebels reached their limits in the winter of 1865.6

Besides war weariness, some men quit the contest because they lost hope of winning independence. Charles Blackford figured that “our men are deserting quite freely,” because “it looks very blue to them, and the fact that Sherman marched from Atlanta to Savannah without seeing an armed Confederate soldier is well calculated to make them despondent.” William James Griggs, a common soldier from Virginia, expressed his despair with rare candor:

Billy you may see some grounds upon which to build your hopes of our final success but as for me I see none... Since last fall 2200 of Longstreet's Corps has deserted. The most of this number going to the enemy. If the troops of the victorious 1st Corps are this demoralized what do you expect of men who have known nothing but defeat for the last seven months? I am certainly not overstating the number when I tell you that the average per night is 100 men and in most cases they desert to the enemy. Genl Lee no longer uses threats of punishment to prevent this but he simply begs the men to wait until Spring & try once more to retrieve our fortunes but his appeal is vain. The men swear they do not intend to fight another battle. In my opinion every man killed or wounded after this it will be cold blooded murder. All know that it is useless for the war to be further persisted.

Griggs concluded, “I would be as glad to see the independence of the South established as any one in the State of Virginia but if there is any truth in men we need not longer contend.” Facing squalor and long odds, many troops shared Griggs’s perceptions in 1865.7

Others despaired because the populace seemed to have already quit the struggle. “A great many have wondered why there was so much desertion in the army during the last three or four months,” Charles Fenton James wrote, “and they have very naturally
attributed it to the reverses which we have met with.” “But this is not the prime cause,”
he surmised. Rather “desertion takes place because desertion is encouraged” by civilians.
He told his sister of a comrade who stayed beyond his allotted leave, because “the ladies
begged him to remain and attend a grand ball which they were going to have.” “Such is
the story of nearly every man who returns from furlough. They all agree that . . . the
people in the country are enjoying themselves more, living higher and dressing finer than
before the war. Dancing parties are heard of every where, and the people seem to have
lost sight of the fact that a war was going on.” James quoted Edmund Burke’s argument
that “‘nations are never murdered but they sometimes commit suicide’” and prayed, “God
forbid that we should be guilty of such folly. Nero fiddled while Rome was burning.
Shall it be said of our people that they exceeded Nero and fiddled and danced while the
land was draped in mourning?” Still other soldiers lamented that the populace seemed not
only apathetic but opposed to the Confederate cause. William Heartsill spent the final
months of the war chasing deserters and the civilians who harbored them. On the day
General Robert E. Lee surrendered his army in Virginia, Heartsill wrote from Texas that
“it is the STANDING duty of all soldiers, and in fact all citizens, to arrest all skulkers
and bring them to justice.” Weeks later he caught a deserter who was absent for two
years. Thomas Hampton volunteered to hunt deserters in the Trans Mississippi
Department and spent the final months of the war scouring the countryside. When the
authorities assigned Confederates to capture fellow soldiers, many troops realized their
cause was doomed.8

Still, diehard Rebels like Heartsill and Hampton could not fathom why men
deserted their country in its moment of greatest need. Because George Marion Coiner
worked in General Richard Anderson’s corps headquarters, he read reports that tallied the number of deserters. When he read one February morning that twenty-five men had vanished from General R. R. Johnson’s division during the night, Coiner wrote, “if there ever was a time for every man to do his duty it is now—We have no other alternative left us now, but to fight on with a determination and will, unprecedented in the history of any war.” John Walters, a native of Amsterdam, was equally appalled:

I who am a foreigner with no ties . . . cannot but think it strange and view with utmost disgust, the picture of men, whose every tie and association is in and of the South, so far forgetting themselves and so reckless of their honor as to desert, and that at a period when more than at any other time their country needs them and their services most. Nor can I see that desertion is any remedy for the evils of hard and scant fare, insufficient clothing, and no pay.

Walters pointed out that deserters not only abandoned the cause but further endangered the lives of their comrades who remained in the trenches. Every quitter deprived General Lee or Johnston of precious firepower against increasing enemy numbers. Walters worried that the rising desertion rate “bids fair to leave but few of us to contend with Grant when the spring weather shall admit active campaigning.” This double abandonment of the one’s cause and comrades partly explains why Rebel units executed deserters during the final weeks of the war. On March 2, 1865, the garrison at Galveston, Texas executed Antone Ricker, age seventeen. Weeks later James M. Williams, commander of Spanish Fort in Mobile, Alabama, told his wife without a trace of emotion that “last Tuesday we had a military execution—I had charge of it and commanded the brigade which was ordered out to witness it. . . . Two more will be shot here during the next week or ten days—they are deserters from my regiment.” The men were Privates
Thomas Elam and Elijah Wynn, friends who had deserted together in September 1863. When three men interrupted General Nathan Bedford Forrest’s breakfast one morning in March 1865 to inform him they were sick of the war and going home, he had them shot on the spot.\(^9\)

But what is most remarkable about the Confederacy in 1865 is not its gloom, desperation, and desertion, but rather the persistent hope and confidence many troops expressed in ultimate triumph. Some Rebels’ capacity for optimism seemed limitless in 1865. Though he ranted about civilian apathy, Charles Fenton James believed that “the conduct of the southern people in the future will be different” and hoped that “a revolution which is now taking place in the public mind will bring a change” for the better. Edgeworth Bird agreed: “our affairs look rather gloomy, but I hope yet for a favorable turn in our fortunes. There is a wonderful power and recuperative energy in the South yet.” Though he chased deserters across Texas, William Heartsill dreamed that “the day is not far off when we will again be permitted to see loved ones at home, and to meet our comrades in arms, and chat over our many dangers and difficulties; and all this I pray, under the FREE and independent FLAG of the SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY.”

How did so many veterans who knew failure and faced defeat, even annihilation, still motivate themselves and perceive the war in a positive light?\(^{10}\)

The same elements that bolstered Confederate morale in 1864 sustained the hopes of thousands during the war’s final weeks. Wishful rumors proliferated, because the chaos, anxiety, and ambiguities that fostered hearsay in 1864 were pervasive in 1865. Reliable communication channels like the media and letters from home disintegrated as the postal service failed. Military intelligence also collapsed, because the Confederate
cavalry—the eyes of the army—were outmatched by greater numbers and superior mounts. Sometimes the situation was so critical that the whereabouts and intentions of entire armies, like Sherman’s, were foggy at best. In this climate of uncertainty, Rebels spread positive rumors to offset bad news and to justify their continued resistance. In short, they used rumors in an attempt to convince themselves and others that all was not lost and that things were actually better than they seemed. When Hugh Montgomery argued that “though we have met reverses & a gloom has come over the land, the sky is still bright, cheering, and there is every thing in the future to make [us] hopeful & true & cheerful,” his straining attempt at optimism suggests that many Confederates wrote of hope in order to keep it alive in their own minds.11

In January and early February 1865, a wave of positive rumors countered the depressing news of Hood’s failure in Tennessee and the loss of Savannah. From Louisiana, Jared Sanders wrote that General Braxton Bragg not only thwarted General Benjamin Butler’s attempt to take Wilmington, North Carolina, but captured 7,000 of his men. He also circulated the rumor that Hood had turned on General George Thomas and captured an entire brigade. Plus, according to Sanders, Forrest’s cavalry had whipped their opponents, marched into Kentucky, and united with General John C. Breckenridge’s force. He assured his family that “this news comes from headquarters & is official.” Hugh Montgomery wrote a friend that “a Gentleman just from Memphis states that the Yankees there say that they were damn badly used up by Hood and really suffered twice as much as we did.” Montgomery claimed that the enemy “do not look upon Hoods retreat as a defeat by any means,” so Confederates should not either.12
The most positive rumors that swept across the South in 1865 promised imminent peace with independence. When word spread that Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens, Virginia Senator Robert M. T. Hunter, and Assistant Secretary of War John A. Cambell, a former U.S. Supreme Court justice, were meeting Federal Secretary of State William Seward to discuss peace terms, many Confederates assumed the Union was seeking an armistice and a compromise. In late January, William Nugent wrote his wife that “the Yankee nation is in a great flurry about peace & has already sent three Commissioners to Richmond to feel our Government. They are satisfied we can never be whipped.” John Cotton was less sanguine about the Confederacy’s ability to dictate terms but still hoped Richmond would forge a compromise before the war was lost. “I think they had better make peace now then to wate til we are subjugated,” Cotton wrote, because “they whip us at every point.” Nevertheless, in the same letter, Cotton considered buying a slave. “There is a captured negro here that I could by if I could get him home but I don’t see no chance,” he reported. Hugh Montgomery figured the Confederacy “will be obliged to make some concessions,” but thought that independence could be achieved by agreeing to abolish slavery. Still he hoped the Rebels could retain “the priviledge of using our negroes as slaves for fifty or seventy years.” These distortions of both enemy resolve and Confederate strength—written within three months of capitulation—exhibit how durable Rebel optimism could be.¹³

On February 3, the Confederate representatives met Seward aboard a Union steamer in Hampton Roads. On board they found President Lincoln who had decided to deliver the Federal terms in person: unconditional surrender, reconstruction, and the abolition of slavery. He refused to consider any armistice short of an end to the war
and would not compromise. When a stunned Senator Hunter replied that even Charles I had negotiated with Rebels during the English Civil War, Lincoln rebutted, “all I distinctly recollect about the case of Charles I, is, that he lost his head.” The much-anticipated Hampton Roads peace conference was finished before it started.\(^\text{14}\)

When weeks of high hopes for peace with independence vanished, many Confederates responded with resolve instead of despondency. Charles Fenton James thought that “Lincoln and Seward pursued the very course which was best for our safety and independence. Surely their hearts have been hardened, as was Pharoah’s, and they are rushing blindly to their own destruction.” James expected that “before this campaign of ‘65 is over they and all their crew will wish they had acted differently.” “As sure as a just God rules on Earth,” James declared, “a terrible defeat awaits them.” Thomas Key wrote that “the terms that Lincoln laid down . . . are so dishonorable that it has had the happy result of uniting our people for a more energetic prosecution of the war.” Ham Chamberlayne also observed benefits from “the bursting of the peace bubble.” “The whole country here is again in a war fever—We hope great things from it,” he wrote from the trenches outside Richmond. Within the capital throngs met “to express their feelings at the insult offered to the Confederate States by President Lincoln, in his ultimatum . . . ‘Submission or Subjugation.’” Creed Thomas Davis thought the people “have made up their minds for a long war.” James Albright wrote in his diary, “no peace short of subjugation or unconditional surrender. ‘Can’t treat with Rebels in arms,’ they say. Glad of it, for the very effort to make terms has depressed our boys” in the army. Edwin Fay responded to the enemy’s effrontery at proposing such terms by arguing “they should make the first overtures and propose recognition before I would allow any one of their
envoys in my lines.” Lincoln’s conditions incited some Rebels to vow eternal defiance. “Rather than submit to a dishonorable settlement,” Thomas Hampton told his wife, “I would prefer a continued war for years.” “I say peace never, if slavery is to perish with it,” exclaimed William Heartsill, “let’s fight it out and GAIN all, or fight it out and LOSE all.” Richard Launcelot Maury hoped that the enemy’s terms would “quiet those miserable criers for peace—and convincing them that there can be no peace, unite them with us in war to the knife, and the knife to the hilt.”

But some Confederate defiance betrayed more than a trace of fatalism. Creed Thomas Davis noted that “our people seem more determined than ever to fight to the bitter end,” but he expected the end would be terrible. “They must see that we will suffer subjugation in the end,” he admitted. “Already we walk hand and hand with famine.” Davis shuddered when he thought “of the desperate campaign that awaits us in the spring. But I will try and do my duty.” George Marion Coiner seemed hesitant when he wrote, “it looks as though we care to fight on for the last ray of hope.” He suspected that the enemy fabricated the peace rumors “as a scheme to dishearten and demoralize the army.” “If so, they have been partly successful,” Coiner confessed, for “our troops were very much elated at the idea of a negotiation for peace but since it has turned out as it has, the disappointment is truly great.” Others seemed to thirst for a sacrificial culmination to the struggle. Edward Crenshaw hoped “that we will fight until the last man, woman, and child in the South is slain. Better death than dishonor.” Whether they feared a bloody finale to the war, accepted it stoically, or sought it as a way to sanctify the cause, many Rebels started to foresee a horrid conclusion.
As full implications of the Hampton Roads impasse sunk in, Confederate soldiers responded in several ways. Many deserted. Others entertained pipe dreams, just as they had after the fall of Atlanta, Lincoln’s reelection, Hood’s disaster in Tennessee, and other catastrophes. Rumor mills still offered a stream of delusions for those who sought them. Some troops despaired that the end of negotiations guaranteed another season of bloody campaigns and an interminable war. Thousands of Rebels remained in the ranks, because comradeship bound them to fellow survivors. Most of these men desired an honorable peace above all else but felt powerless to do anything that might foster a resolution. Others rallied together to convince themselves and the world that all was well. As united voices, regiments and brigades throughout the Confederacy resolved to continue the struggle and swore their constant devotion to the cause.

Rumors of foreign intervention, however improbable they might seem from today’s perspective, captivated thousands of troops in 1865. In January reports promised an imminent alliance with France or Great Britain if the Confederacy would abolish slavery. Hugh Montgomery understood that “the whole world is against Slavery,” but he figured if the Confederacy called its labor system “anything else but Slavery . . . recognition & intervention is bound to come.” On January 18 Thomas Key announced that “France has recognized the Confederacy on condition that these States emancipate the slaves.” Days later he read in the press that an “alliance between England, France, and Spain” was poised to dictate terms to the United States that would recognize Confederate independence. Conversely, William Nugent learned from northern papers that the United States proposed a coalition of Union and Confederate armies “to whip England and preserve the Monroe doctrine.” Meanwhile Fred Fleet told his father that a Rebel
emissary had "borrowed 43 millions in gold from Germany, giving cotton & tobacco as
security, & that he proposes to throw 10 millions on the market and thus redeem a great
proportion of the currency." An officer stationed in the Trans Mississippi Department
wrote that a friend of his "has Maximillian on the brain, and wants to get to some point in
Txs where we will be in striking distance of Mexico." In 1863 Louis Napoleon
proclaimed Hapsburg Archduke Ferdinand Maximillian the Emperor of Mexico after
35,000 French troops sacked Mexico City and ousted Benito Juarez's republican
government. Many Confederates envisioned a North American alliance between southern
plantation owners and hacienda landlords.17

Talk of foreign intervention flourished after the peace conference fizzled. On
February 16 William Heartsill suspected that "the situation . . . in North America at this
time is such, that foreign powers may force terms unpleasant to both the North and
South." Many rumors claimed that European powers would not recognize Lincoln's
second term of office, which started March 4, because the southern states did not
participate in the election. Hugh Montgomery was certain that "after the 4th of March this
country will be [a] separate and distinct nation from the U.S. and so recognized by one or
more of the European powers." William Nugent agreed that "England & France will not
recognize Lincoln as President of anything but the Northern States after the 4th of March,
and a war seems almost inevitable." When March 4 came and went without an eruption
of world war, Charles Blackford nonetheless told his wife, "I think there is some comfort
to be derived from the hope of war between France and the United States." Scenarios of
peace through foreign aid still filled the newspapers through the end of March. Captain E.
D. Cheatham was "inclined to think that something will grow out of the peace rumors."
In late March, Edward Crenshaw spread the rumor that a member of the British Parliament promised recognition from Britain and France if the Confederacy "gained a decided success within the next few months." On March 26, a week before the fall of Richmond, David Pierson imagined that a Federal campaign into the Trans Mississippi Department (perhaps because it bordered Maximilian’s domain) might spark foreign intercession.¹⁸

While rumors of international aid attracted some Confederates, others admonished their countrymen to unite and secure their own independence. Enraged by civilian melancholy or by Lincoln’s stark demands, many regiments gathered to reprove naysayers, denounce peace negotiations, and rededicate their lives to the cause. As the Staunton Artillery declared on February 1, 1865, "the despondency talked of does not exist in the army." The Virginians were "determined never to acquiesce in any accommodation short of independence." "We believe this to be the spirit of the whole army," they proclaimed, "and we appeal to the people of our loved homes to respond to it." Because the soldiers sent these resolutions to newspapers and the Confederate Congress, these records illustrate how the veterans directly addressed the country during its darkest hour. In order to inspire the populace, the soldiers invariably evoked the same elements that had bolstered their own morale during the war’s final phase: faith in Providential deliverance, perceptions of the enemy, and warped views of the military situation. These resolutions were litanies of Confederate invincibility.¹⁹

Many public resolutions broadcasted a constant faith that God favored the Confederacy and intended to rescue it from defeat. A brigade of South Carolinians promised, "with the aid of Heaven, we will continue the struggle until our independence
be achieved or we perish in the attempt.” In late January Virginia infantrymen resolved “under Divine protection, never to submit to the Government of the United States.” Other Virginians confessed they had “unbounded confidence in our ability, under the guidance of an overruling Providence, to achieve a glorious triumph in the present struggle, directed by that great, good and gallant spirit that has often led us to victory.” A Mississippi brigade looked to the Almighty, “the giver of every good and perfect gift,” to bring them ultimate triumph. “Relying on a just God,” the Ninth Virginia Infantry vowed to “reconsecrate our best energies” to the goal of independence. William Heartsill’s unit pledged to “fight the incarnate fiend, so long as we have an organized force, and a kind Providence will give us strength and power to wield a sword or aim a rifle.” All these resolutions sought to remind Confederates that with God as their ally, the Rebellion could not fail, and thus pessimists were not only cowards in the soldiers’ eyes but unbelievers as well.20

The troops also enumerated (and exaggerated) the enemy’s atrocities to underscore the Confederacy’s goodness and to convince the nation that defeat would be worse than hell. McGowan’s Brigade of South Carolinians reasoned that if the Rebels had correctly judged four years ago “that the enemy intended to impoverish and oppress us, we now know that they propose to subjugate, enslave, disgrace and destroy us.” Mississippians swore that the enemy was not only “a cruel foe” but “cold-blooded murderers.” Virginian infantrymen pleaded with the populace not to be unnerved by “the cruel vindictiveness and angry boasts of our enemy,” but to resist “to the last extremity, a foe, subjection to who would make life itself a burden.” Another infantry regiment claimed that the enemy had “spared no species of insult nor injury that malice could
devise,” and planned for the Rebels “worse than Egyptian bondage.” “It is better to die freemen that to live slaves,” they resolved. The officers and men of the 57th Virginia regiment could not fathom how the people could consider “recanting their declaration of independence from the accursed Yankee despotism which once enthralled us,” and reminded citizens that the enemy had committed “the most fiendish outrages and cruelties; has desolated and destroyed our country and committed every barbarity recorded in the past annals of rapacity, wrong and rapine.” Here the soldier who penned the resolutions warmed to his subject: “now is no time to dream of submission and reconstruction, when the enemy is at our very door; . . . while the shrieks of our insulted women ring ever in our ear; while the smoke of a whole country, consumed and desolated, yet hangs over the lovely Valley of the Shenandoah, and when the flames which destroyed the whole of Central Georgia have scarce died out.” Submission would “consign us and our children to a bondage and slavery which would be insupportably base and degrading, and hand us and our posterity down to the latest time, coupled with an infamy to which any thing—even annihilation itself—were far preferable.” Bratton’s Brigade declared that the outrages upon us by a base and unprincipled foe, in violation of all the usages of civilized warfare, have created an impassable gulf between the two sections, which must forever prevent all union or affiliation between them,” and like most other resolutions, Bratton’s document considered subjugation “worse than death.” By evoking images of disgraced loved ones, smoldering homesteads, and roving enemy bands, the Rebels hoped to convince their populace that defeat was too terrible to permit.21
The soldiers also asserted that the war was not going as badly as civilians thought it was. A South Carolina brigade told their countrymen: "at every stage of the unequal conflict, the valor endurance and patriotic devotion of our people have secured a succession of victories of which any nation might well be proud." The South Carolinians argued that "the contest is still undecided" and "timid counsels" and "causeless despondency" within the nation, rather than the enemy's "temporary success," threatened to ruin the Confederacy. The brigade focused on its past triumphs to the point that it seemed unaffected by its recent setbacks. "In the late reverses which have attended our arms," the soldiers saw "nothing which should obscure the light of our former glorious victories, [or] which should create a feeling of despondency or doubt of the ultimate success of our cause." They believed that "one more determined effort is alone necessary to achieve our independence." The resolutions adopted by three Virginia companies exhibited the same preference for past victories over present circumstances. "In the present aspect of affairs," they confessed, "we see nothing to occasion gloom or despondency, but, on the contrary, we believe that the past four years of war have proved, beyond all doubt, the abilities of the slave-holding States to maintain and protect, against all enemies, the Government which they have established." Other troops reasoned that "we have had our share of victories, and we must expect some defeats." They compared the Confederacy's condition to the despair pervasive in Revolutionary America before the victory at Yorktown. "In the language of General Greene, during the darkest hours of the Revolution, when he was struggling to recover South Carolina, then entirely overrun and suffering under the scourge of Tarlton," the Rebels quoted, "Independence is certain, if the people have the fortitude to bear and the courage to persevere.""
The 57th Virginia regiment urged the populace not "to hesitate, to falter in the brave, proud course which has hitherto been marked out for them," because General Lee only needed support from the people and government in order to "lead us again to victory and success, and crown our efforts with an honorable independence and lasting peace." 22

To culminate their appeal for renewed defiance, many Confederates recalled dead comrades and vowed to defend the cause they had died for against the enemy that had killed them. A brigade of Mississippians vowed: "the melancholy but sweet recollections of comrades who now sleep in bloody graves, preclude forever for us the sacrilege of a Re-construction." The Ninth Virginia argued that "we owe it to ourselves, to the cause or liberty, and to the memory of those who have fallen in our sacred cause, to resist, to the last extremity." Another Virginia unit proclaimed, "the blood of our brothers, our sons and our fathers call upon us for vengeance." "Their bones lie bleaching on every hill-top and valley, from the blood-stained heights of Gettysburg to the placid waters of the Rio Grande." A South Carolina brigade also claimed that the best blood of the country had been shed and patriot bones were scattered across the land. They vowed never to abandon "a cause which has been consecrated by so many costly sacrifices, and crowned by so many illustrious victories." The soldiers admonished citizens that quitting the cause for which thousands had perished was cowardice. The 14th Virginia Infantry declared that anyone who abandoned the Confederacy was "unworthy to breathe the air of freedom, and should, with his posterity, be the serfs of serfs, to the remotest generation."

According to the diehards, a nation that quit its struggle for independence deserved infamy for all of history—Biblical bondage would plague them for centuries. But the
unabated fervor of the veterans of our armies,” as the Virginians put it, still stood between the Confederacy and a fate of the basest subjugation.  

Though soldiers submitted these resolutions to inspire the populace, the act of drafting such vows profoundly affected the troops. In fact, these documents probably inspired their creators more than they influenced their audience. The soldiers’ movement to congregate and swear their lives in defense of the Rebellion was strikingly similar to the religious revivals that swept through Confederate camps. Whether they were animated by concerns for civilian despondency or by inner forebodings about the coming campaigns, troops found strength and comfort by banding together and voicing a faith in ultimate triumph. Soldiers who met and expressed rhetoric of patriotic sacrifice were also reliving the emotional days of 1861 when they first volunteered to oppose the Union. Memories of fallen comrades and the sight of fellow survivors vowing to fight to the end overwhelmed some soldiers. Charles Fenton James wrote his sister two long letters detailing the ceremony in which his unit composed resolutions. He told her, “I now feel as I felt in June ‘61 when I first enlisted. . . . The same spirit which actuated me then, actuates me now; and I feel as buoyant and hopeful and as confident of the result of this war as I ever felt in the midst of the most brilliant successes.” “After four years of bloody war—of hardships and privations,” James proclaimed, “the veteran soldiers of the invincible army of Northern Virginia, are speaking to the country.” Earlier that day, James’s regiment drafted and unanimously passed resolutions to protract the war. A band played martial music while a committee wrote a preamble and resolutions. After the vows were unanimously passed, officers and civilian dignitaries spoke at length about the Confederacy’s imminent success. A judge from Kentucky spoke for over two hours and
promised the regiment that “when the Spring campaign opened we would have five hundred thousand men under arms.” Another man refused to give a speech but predicted “that the Yankee armies would be defeated in the next campaign and that the war would be over by Christmas.” When Lincoln began his second term in early March, Sergeant Edwin Fay presided over a meeting in which his unit reenlisted for four more years. He crowed that Lincoln had already tried to rule the Confederacy for four years, “but our brave soldiers have been invincible.” Fred Fleet’s brigade also vowed “as a body for war to the bitter end instead of any reconstruction.” He hoped that the resolutions “will raise us in the estimation of our comrades beyond the clouds of malice and reproach.” Fleet’s comment suggests that some units penned resolutions to solidify their reputations as diehards.24

While wishful rumors continued to impress the men and resolutions bolstered their solidarity, faith in God’s favor provided bedrock for Confederate confidence in 1865. People are often attracted to religion in times of great uncertainty and pain, and the nature of Confederate religion particularly connected Rebel adversity to God. Rebels who viewed themselves as chosen people destined for greatness expected providential deliverance from defeat even as their nation crumbled around them. Thus, Christian Confederates viewed setbacks as evidence of God chastening them rather than as signs of their imminent doom. As a Louisiana lieutenant noted in January 1865, “all that happens to us, is for the good. God will sometimes send us disasters to bring us to our senses.” In late February, Thomas Hampton wrote his wife, “I really think that this war will in a short time assume a different character I.E. for our good.” “Although things to some may look gloomy,” Hampton did not despair because “in God we may look for redemption.”
Believers considered even the darkest circumstances to be lessons from a loving God. Victory would come when the Almighty wished it.\textsuperscript{25}

The Confederacy observed its final day of national fasting and prayer on March 10, 1865, less than a month before Richmond fell. On the occasion, Thomas Key believed “that the Supreme Ruler will soon reward the Sons of Liberty for their prayers with a great victory,” because “almost every national day of humiliation and fasting has been followed with some marked triumph on some bloody battlefield.” Rawleigh William Downman prayed that “God in his great mercy may look with favor on our cause and deliver us from our enemies.” Richard Launcelot Maury’s description of the fast day illustrates how Confederates conceived of their relationship with God: he saw the fast day as an opportunity to “entreat a merciful God to forgive us our sins—to stand on our side and to give us victory.” For Maury and thousands of others, divine forgiveness and Confederate triumph were one in the same.\textsuperscript{26}

The persistence of religious fervor in the Confederacy was evident in the high level of religious activity that continued to the final days of the war. As their ranks thinned and their future grew darker, many soldiers needed to believe that God was an ever-present and unswerving ally. James Keith admitted that he derived comfort from looking “to him who has promised never to desert those who put their trust in him.” Keith’s use of the word desert is poignant—shirkers and comrades were disappearing from the trenches, but God was not. A minister who served Lee’s troops during the final months of the war noted that “the revivals . . . during the winter of 1864–65 were as general and as powerful as any we had at all and only ceased when the army disbanded.” Historian James Silver has noted that “as late as March ministers of all denominations in
Virginia were in the field, addressing the people in an effort to encourage moral firmness and support of the war." Less than a week before Richmond fell, Richard Launcelot Maury still attended prayer meetings daily. Creed Thomas Davis noted in his diary how a local reverend preached to the troops regularly in the last months of the struggle and always brought religious tracts "which he scatters profusely through the camp." Robert Augustus Stiles collected Christian pamphlets and gave them to troops whose units lacked chaplains. As noted in past chapters, many of these publications were wildly optimistic about Confederate success. "It is pleasant, in the midst of this torrent & rush of earthly burdens & confusion," wrote Stiles, "to turn to the green pastures & the still waters of God's love." "Just to turn away to that blessed great part of our soul's life" offered Stiles and fellow believers a beautiful release from their darkest days.²⁷

Rumors and religious convictions affected how Confederates interpreted the news they received in 1865. Somehow, many diehards still managed to claim victories and depict the military situation with optimism. They yearned for good news and interpreted ambiguous reports in positive ways. Richard Launcelot Maury's 1865 diary exudes his notions of Confederate invincibility. Throughout the final months of the war Maury, an infantry colonel, was in Richmond recuperating from a serious wound. Doctors told him he would never be well enough to return to his regiment, but Maury scoffed at their diagnosis just as he laughed at "croakers" who predicted doom for the Rebels. "I cannot be conquered, no! Not by the whole Yankee nation," he hollered. When President Davis gave General Lee command of all Confederate forces, Maury thought the news foreshadowed great victories. He knew the Confederacy "must succeed" in the coming campaign and figured its chances were "better now, since that great and good man has
taken the helm.” Maury guessed that Lee planned to take the offensive “and deal Grant a pretty heavy lick.” When Lee reinstated General Joe Johnston as commander of the Army of Tennessee, Maury trusted the general would bring Sherman “to grief.” “Hurra for Old Joe,” he exclaimed, “I bet on Joe.” As had so many other Rebels, Maury trusted that his favorite generals could perform miracles against their adversaries.28

But February brought news of the fall of Columbia, Charleston, and Wilmington. Maury noted that “some of the weak kneed poor wretches” in Richmond “are terribly frightened” by the bad news. “How glad I am that I possess such a hopeful disposition, and such ‘Maury obstinacy,’ he noted—such events did not dampen his spirits or alter his “never say die” attitude. When Richmond citizens voiced anxiety for the capitol’s safety in March, Maury branded them “craven-hearted.” “It is a disgrace to the South and to the very Earth that such men should live,” he announced. “They cry out that we are whipped already and must make peace on any terms—confound the scoundrels [alas that we have to fight for them] we are not near conquered yet.” Maury viewed the evacuation of Charleston and Wilmington as good news, because troops stationed there could now “concentrate against Sherman and no doubt whip him.” As Johnston gave up more territory to Sherman’s columns, including Goldsboro and Fayetteville, North Carolina, Maury still hoped that Johnston was saving his smaller force for a dramatic blow that would cripple Sherman. As for Lee, Maury wished that the general would “move upon Washington which must be almost entirely uncovered.” Knowing that such a move exposed Richmond and seemed unlikely to work because of low manpower, Maury still wanted Lee to try it.29
Maury’s high expectations for Johnston and Lee seemed to bear fruit in late March when both generals appeared to score triumphs. Outside Bentonville, North Carolina, Johnston’s army attacked a detached wing of Sherman’s force. “Good news from Johnston as I was sure there would be soon,” Maury wrote on March 20. “He has met Sherman and whipped him. . . . Drove him a mile when meeting reinforcements [Sherman] rallied, and assumed the offensive, but was easily repulsed.” Maury claimed that Johnston captured 1,500 prisoners and three pieces of artillery. In fact, it was the Confederates who lost 1,500 men while inflicting only 933 casualties. The affair could have been worse, but Sherman let Johnston’s men escape because the Federal general saw the end of the war approaching and wanted to spare both sides further bloodshed. Days later, Maury learned that Lee’s men “attacked the enemy near Petersburg, drove them from their works capturing 9 cannon and 500 or 600 prisoners.” When Grant counterattacked on March 30, Maury noted that the Union ranks were repulsed until Grant quit, “leaving many dead and wounded Yanks in our hands.” Maury either could not or would not recognize that these Confederate attacks were desperate attempts by Rebel forces to avoid being enclosed by larger Federal armies. Three days later, the Rebel defenses around Richmond crumbled and Grant’s thousands stormed the capitol.30

Facing or Fleeing Surrender, April–June 1865

Though Richmond’s evacuation on April 2 marked the beginning of the end, many Confederates who participated in the chaos could not grasp the its complete significance. Colonel George Alexander Martin was sick in bed when an officer of his command rushed in to tell him that Lee’s army was in full retreat and that the government
had already fled from the capitol. Martin galloped into town to find his men “and if necessary die with them.” Instead he discovered panic and mayhem. “Commissary Stores were being removed or destroyed, wagons drays and other vehicles were loading, or being driven swiftly through the streets, creating a rumbling and confused noise, and their drivers were cursing and shouting, men were hallooing, women screaming, children crying, horses neighing and engines whistling.” People, beasts, and loot blocked the streets, and government stores of liquor flooded the gutters. Fires started by Confederates consumed parts of the city and “lent a horrid glow to the surroundings.” Gunboats and magazines exploded, spraying pyrotechnics into the sky. Martin could not find his men but gathered that all of Lee’s troops were heading west for Lynchburg or Danville, while Grant’s forces closed around them and marched for the capitol. He feared the fires would burn down the city’s bridges before he could escape across one.31

After the collapse at Richmond, the city’s defenders fought and fled westward during a week of disorganized activity. Contemporary accounts of their scramble from Richmond to Appomattox Court House are rare, because few troops found time to eat and sleep let alone express their thoughts in writing. Those who did record the events conveyed confusion, fatigue, and disbelief. Many chroniclers strove to comprehend the “rather startling intelligence,” as John Walters put it, that Richmond was gone and the war was lost. Others looked for ways to end the struggle with their honor intact. A few diehards who still refused to accept reality fled it and their comrades in an attempt to continue the fight.32

As John Walters marched westward he tried to prepare himself for the future. “What fate may have in store for us, I cannot imagine, but I fear that the last days of the
Army of Northern Virginia is near at hand,” he scribbled on April 4. The next day Walters noted that “many of the men [are] in apparently as good spirits as ever,” but it seemed to him “that the usual jest was constrained, while the laughter was evidently forced.” He doubted that the army could escape the enemy’s grasp “as both men and horses are broken down and the rations which were served out today were two ears of corn per man.” Personally, Walters admitted that he was “almost used up” and worried about falling behind. But instead of dreading the thought of becoming a prisoner, Walters feared that he would miss the army’s momentous finale: “Ere many days General Lee will need the service of every man, and though one man can do but little, yet when the death struggle takes place, I should like to be there.” Walters sensed history was taking place and wanted to play his part.33

Rawleigh Downman, a cavalry sergeant, was too busy fending off the enemy to write as regularly as Walters did. As one of General Fitz Lee’s horse soldiers, Downman served as the rear guard for the army after it abandoned its trenches. Riding westward over hills, across fields, and down country roads, Downman and his comrades stopped to fight at Scott’s Corner, Namozine Church, Deep Creek, Tabernacle Church, and near Amelia Court House in just three days. On April 5 they received word that the enemy had seized a line of Confederate wagons and raced to protect the panicked teamsters and precious supplies. When Downman heard that a servant was heading toward his home, he stopped and penned a long letter to his wife on April 6. “Every thing has been so stirred up since our evacuation of Richmond that I cannot write you a very connected letter,” he confessed. Nevertheless he assured her, “you must not be depressed on account of our defeat at Petersburg,” because “the affair was not as bad as you may have heard.”
Downman went on to inform his wife that the Confederates had been successful against the raid on the wagon train: “we whipt them handsomely and took about 80 prisoners.” Moreover, his unit “attacked a brigade of Yankee infantry—killed their general a large number of men & captured about 700.” What is most striking about Downman’s account is his belief that the evacuation of Richmond and the ensuing retreat were not the end of the war but rather the resumption of active campaigning. “I cannot tell you all my adventures since the active campaign commenced,” he explained. Still, Downman figured that “this is to be the last regular campaign. If we can stem the torrent we are safe. If not then organized resistance ends and we enter upon the period of irregular warfare & no one can tell how many years it may last.” Even though Downman had been in the saddle for days fighting against great numbers, he still highlighted minor tactical gains and hoped all was not lost.34

While Downman sought silver linings, another cavalryman, Cornelius Hart Carlton watched as his unit melted away from desertions. Ten or twelve men left during the night of April 3 and went home. On the following night, eight or ten more quit as they crossed the railroad bridge over the Appomattox River. When he fed his horse on the morning of April 5, Carlton realized more men had disappeared in the dark. Of the 35,000 troops who left the trenches on April 2, only 8,000 surrendered a week later. The rest either deserted or were captured during the long scurry. On April 6, Giles Buckner Cooke noted that only a few divisions of the First and Third Corps “had any organization.” “The rest of the troops were straggling terribly and rapidly disintegrating.” That same day, three Union corps surrounded a quarter of Lee’s army at Sayler’s Creek
and captured 6,000 men. When Lee received the news, he asked with astonishment, “My God! Has the army been dissolved?” No, but it was almost gone.35

The following day, April 7, Grant and Lee started to negotiate surrender via messages passed by flags of truce. But even Lee seemed unable to accept the end, and the correspondence stalled the following day. That night the fires from Union camps surrounded what was left of the Army of Northern Virginia. “What will become of us all tomorrow?,” Giles Buckner Cooke asked himself. The thought of never seeing his family again was “maddening,” and he expected “to be captured or killed” in the morning.

“Great God make me strong,” he prayed, “prepare me for whatever fate.” On the morning of April 9, the Confederates charged Federal cavalry in an attempt to break out of Grant’s tightening grip. The Union horsemen fled, and Rebels seized two cannons. But two corps of Yankee infantry filled the gap, and the Confederates were outnumbered five or six to one. Lee finally agreed to surrender, though he told an officer, “I would rather die a thousand deaths.”36

When Lee returned to his lines after completing the proceedings with Grant, Confederates yelled and surrounded him. For years the men had cheered their general, so the outcry might have been no more than custom. But many of these Rebels were not yet prepared to surrender. As one scholar has noted, “despite their grinding week-long retreat and its heavy losses, more from straggling than combat—despite last night’s red western glow of enemy campfires and this morning’s breakout failure; despite the coming and going of couriers, blue and gray, and [Lee’s] own outward passage through their line of battle. . . . many of them were still not ready to believe the end had come.” Postwar
accounts and legends claim that troops crowded Lee and swore they “would fight ‘em yet” if the general would say the word. Instead Lee asked them to go home.\textsuperscript{37}

The realization that they were surrendered was too much for some soldiers to accept. “While I knew that things were going badly,” David Gregg MacIntosh admitted, “I was not prepared for such intelligence, and a thunderbolt from heaven could hardly have shocked me more.” Weighing his options, MacIntosh decided, “my first duty was to my country, and that as long as I could be of service to her I should avoid surrender.” He and some comrades who “could not brook the thought of witnessing the spectacle of surrender” tore off their military insignia and escaped through the Appomattox swamp. Ham Chamberlayne fled with MacIntosh and wrote his sister days later that “we refused to take part in the funeral at Appomattox C.H.” “I am by no means conquered yet,” he exclaimed. Chamberlayne expected to join Johnston’s army, and if that force surrendered, he would head for Texas and maybe Mexico. “If the struggle is over I will go abroad & hope to provide a refuge for us all,” he wrote on April 21 from Charlotte, North Carolina.\textsuperscript{38}

Most troops used a series of activities less dramatic than MacIntosh and Chamberlayne’s flight to help themselves accept the surrender. Upon hearing the “sad news” James Albright “felt like an old horse... turned out to die.” He cried with his comrades, said good-bye, and “started south” for home. Others mingled with the enemy, especially after Federal troops delivered three days’ rations for 25,000 men to the famished Rebels. The size and condition of the Union army stunned John Walters: “I have seen more of the Yankee army passing of endless lines of troops, artillery, and wagon trains than I ever saw before, and in view of the immense numbers, unlimited
resources, and perfect and complete appointments in all that belongs to an army, my astonishment is not that we were all compelled to surrender day, but that we were able to stand as we have for four years with our comparatively small numbers, lean cattle, and imperfect equipment.” Walters realized that misperceptions of the enemy and notions of Confederate invincibility had sustained the Rebellion for months if not years.39

News of Lee’s surrender affected the rest of the Confederacy like shock waves. As reports radiated from Virginia, they had less impact on soldiers who were farther from the event. Three days before the capitulation, Joseph Bryan was riding with Colonel John Mosby’s partisans in northern Virginia when he heard of Richmond’s fall. “What the ultimate result will be remains concealed from mortals,” he wrote. Bryan thought, “we can but fight and pray our best.” Among the soldiers, Bryan heard no cry for peace but instead “an unusual desire to meet the enemy that we may at least give a few Yanks a satisfactory evidence that all the Rebs are neither dead nor captured yet.” Despite their spirit, Appomattox decided the course of action for Mosby’s men, and they disbanded and went home on April 21. On that day, Mosby told his horsemen that “the vision we have cherished of a free and independent country has vanished.” In Virginia, it was clear to Mosby that the Confederacy “is now the spoil of the conqueror.”40

Farther away in North Carolina, the fate of the Army of Tennessee was also influenced by Lee’s surrender, but the full impact was slower to take affect. Captain Samuel Foster recorded the army’s reactions as the consequences of Appomattox seeped into the soldiers’ mentalities. He and others were demoralized but still hoped and believed “that we will whip this fight yet.” But as men from Lee’s army passed through Johnston’s camp on their way home, Foster and his comrades started to consider the
likelihood that they too would be surrendered. “Of course there is great excitement about it,” he remarked, “and there are various suggestions which, if Gen Johnson could act upon would of course save the army” from capitulation. When the men learned on April 17 that Johnston was meeting with Sherman, many veterans discussed their plans for going home. Others did not warm to capitulation yet. Foster noted that “some say the [war] is settled and some say that the difficulty has hardly begun.”

As in the past, when troops faced great uncertainty, rumors circulated that offered false hopes and obscured the truth. Talk of foreign intervention rose from the ashes of improbability and charmed the veterans once more. On April 19, Foster reported that “the United States has recognized the Confederacy, and agrees to give us all our rights (and slavery) if we will help them to fight all their enemies.” Rather than face their current condition, some troops preferred to imagine an imminent world war:

Some think that the big war is about to commence, a war of some Magnitude. France Austria Mexico and the Confederacy on one side, against England Russia and the U S on the other, and the great battle ground will be in the Confederacy. One plan is for the Confederacy to go back into the Union, then France will declare war with the U S and land her troops on the C S Coast where they will have to opposition, and as the French Army advances through the C S the people will take the oath of Allegiance to France, and our soldiers will enlist under French colors.

For days, veterans of the Army of Tennessee sought any scenario but defeat. When Foster realized that Johnston received no terms short of “submission reunion free negroes &c,” he exclaimed, “we have been fighting too long for that.” He and many others could not readily let go of a cause for which they had made so many sacrifices. While negotiations
for his surrender were passing between the armies, Foster wrote, “I have not seen a man
today but says fight on rather than submit.”

When Johnston’s men surrendered on April 26, the Confederacy still had
thousands of troops in the Deep South and across the Mississippi, but the nation’s two
vetern armies were gone. “What a mine of startling events has been sprung upon us in
the last fortnight,” Edgeworth Bird wrote from his home in Georgia. “The impression
seems to be gaining ground that the war is over. A short time will develop all.” Fellow
Georgian George Mercer admitted that “we are now passing through a period of deep
depression.” He listed his country’s woes:

Our money depreciated so rapidly that it threatens soon to
become worthless. The enemy are penetrating every part of
our land with their raiding parties, burning and destroying.
One column has taken Selma and Montgomery and is moving
on Columbus, another from East Tennessee has reached
Salisbury, North Carolina, while rumors says another is moving
on Augusta, another from Charleston, Winnsboro, South Carolina.
Our railroad connections are all being severed and many think
we can no longer feed large armies in the field and that we must
resort to the guerilla system.

Mercer then compared these conditions to those of the enemy who “does not appear to
feel the war at all.” The United States was enjoying “wealth and comfort,” and
“immigration far more than repairs the loss in battle.” Moreover the enemy “boasted that
the recent discoveries of petroleum alone will create wealth enough to pay off [the
Federal] war debt.” These signs that “God appears to smile on their cause” disturbed
Mercer, and he tried to brush them aside. “While there is life, there is hope,” he
proclaimed. “We must continue the good fight and leave the rest to Heaven.”
When the news reached Alabama in late April, it elicited the same pattern of denial and confusion. On April 25 officers in Brewersville reported the situation to their men during a dress parade. Edwin Leet relayed the information to his wife the next day: “we have received glorious news... stating that General R. E. Lee had had a great battle with Genl Grant, and had killed a great number of Yankeys, and that Grant asked for an armistice, to which Lee had agreed.” Leet went on to report that “one hundred thousand of Grants army deserted” when they heard of Lincoln’s assassination and Johnston “had whipped Sherman badly” in a recent contest. Though he doubted the hearsay, Leet hoped that it was true. In Mobile Charles Andry knew the war was over, but he was “entirely at loss as to what course to pursue.” Though he wanted to honor his pledge to the Confederacy as long as it existed, Andry could not earn a living until he swore allegiance to the United States. He asked his father for advice: “Why should I... cling to a cause or party which has so little vitality? I think my duty now in considering the present aspect of affairs, (which is so plain,) is to do the best I can to provide for the wants of my wife and child.” Because many Confederates lacked a formal surrender ceremony, they sought personal ways to end the war and resume civilian life with honor.44

Soldiers across the Mississippi River were the last to receive news from the east and accept its implications. On April 23, Colonel Louis Bringier told his wife to hire out their slaves if she could, because their labor was worth gold specie. Bringier was so pleased by the “cheering news” that John Wilkes Booth had murdered Lincoln that he named his child after the assassin. In Shreveport, Louisiana, David Pierson also drew confidence from the president’s death. Moreover, Pierson heard that only part of Lee’s army had capitulated, and the latest news from the Army of Tennessee reported that its
men were “in good condition and still hopeful.” Johnston’s army had already surrendered. When authorities in Shreveport planned a mass meeting “to give confidence to the doubting and despondent,” Pierson scoffed at this attempt “to bind up the wounds of the mangled Confederacy with plausible reasonings and sweet words.” He preferred that every man simply shoulder a gun and fight.45

Weeks after Samuel Foster struggled with the finality of defeat in his diary, William Heartsill faced the same challenge in his writing. In Texas, Heartsill did not hear of the fall of Richmond until April 16—two weeks after the event and a week after Lee’s surrender. Though “Charleston, Savannah, Wilmington, Atlanta, Petersburg, and perhaps Mobile and Richmond have fallen” and though “Sherman has marched triumphantly through Georgia and South Carolina, and is now burning his way through the ‘Old North State,’” Heartsill still believed that God would deliver Confederate victory. “It is a bitter ordeal through which He is leading us to independence; but Oh how sweet that liberty [will feel], when obtained by bleeding hearts, and tears of anguish.” “Through His Omnipotent power we will yet triumph,” he exclaimed. “Through all this dark and gloomy present,” Heartsill still saw “a bright and glorious future.” He predicted, “the enemy will . . . meet with tremendous, and overwhelming reverses, and that too at a moment when least expected. “May a kind providence protect and shield the right,” he prayed.46

When news of Lee’s surrender reached Heartsill and his comrades, they denied the report and spread hopeful rumors. Some men claimed that England and France had recognized the Confederacy. Others announced that “Emporer Napoleon had landed a large Army on the Texas coast.” Jared Sanders also heard that French ships were en route
for the Gulf of Mexico and that Parisian men were enrolling in the army at a rate not seen since the Crimean War. Heartsill thought, “we should make one mighty, determined effort. For if foreign powers ever do intend to extend any aid, this is ‘The auspicious moment.’” He scorned people who called for peace: “we are NOT whipped, we CAN and we MUST fight; subjugation never.” On May 9, Heartsill’s regiment met and resolved that they “have perfect confidence in, and will render willing obedience to our Commanding officers; and will not lay down our arms, so long as there is a Confederate soldier to vindicate the cause of Southern freedom.” Their colonel urged them to “stand by their country, and if the worst comes to the worst, to stand man to man.”

When western troops learned that all their allies east of the river had capitulated, some diehards hoped they could save the Confederacy themselves. Heartsill imagined that “the Trans Mississippi could defy the combined powers of all Yankeedom.” Junius Bragg figured, “there is an Army here sufficient to worry the Yankees for a long time.” Bragg saw himself and other remaining Rebels on the threshold of glory or subjugation—the choice was theirs. “When thoughts of submission come into our minds,” Bragg wrote, “we think of Yankee Masters, a ruined country, Negro equality and the mortification of defeat, and fight on a little longer.” Edwin Fay also dreamed that western soldiers “could hold out for ten years and worry the Yankees into a recognition of the Confederacy.” Fay even envied General Kirby Smith, the commander of the Trans Mississippi, because Smith had a chance to become the father of the Confederacy and place his name next to Washington’s in the pantheon of national military greatness. Only soldiers who had not encountered Grant’s or Sherman’s 100,000 men armies could entertain fantasies of defying the Union for years with Kirby Smith’s 35,000.
By mid-May, Smith’s army was only that formidable on paper. Desertion and Trans Mississippian’s attitude to fight where and when they pleased left Smith with few men and fewer options. On May 12–13, some of these free-spirited troops fought three Union regiments at Palmito Ranch, Texas. The Federals enjoyed early success, but the Rebels rallied and pushed the enemy down the banks of the Rio Grande. The final Civil War engagement of significant size was a Confederate victory. Meanwhile, Kirby Smith met with the exiled governors of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri. The civilians wanted to surrender, but their general favored resistance until President Davis arrived to take command. When Smith learned that Davis had been captured in southern Georgia days earlier, he finally agreed to surrender on May 26. Smith signed documents that capitulated the last Confederates on June 2. With a stroke of the pen, all diehards who refused to accept defeat were no longer loyal soldiers but fugitives from the law.49

The Elements of Persistence

As the war closed in defeat and ruin, a number of factors sustained Confederates’ belief that they and their nation were unconquerable. First, confidence in victory withstood so much counter evidence, because the elements that supported a diehard mentality were often irrefutable, ambiguous, or central to Confederates’ worldview. Faith that God favored the Confederacy grounded many Rebels’ reality. Bad news did not discredit this fundamental belief; instead the belief shaped how soldiers interpreted catastrophic events. Likewise, Confederate perceptions of the enemy gave meaning and motivation to thousands who fought and killed the foe. Union successes did not change Confederate notions that the enemy was evil, inept, and unworthy of triumph, but rather
views of the adversary influenced how Rebels grasped the possibility of defeat and compelled many of them to fight harder and blame southerners for Confederate setbacks. Moreover, the fog of war obscured the full power of Federal armies. Rebels knew they were outnumbered, but they had faced and beaten larger armies throughout the war. It is worth noting that even Lee and Johnston, with all the intelligence they gathered during the final campaigns, underestimated the size of their adversaries’ forces. Finally, rumors of Rebel victories, foreign intervention, and northern disasters were too ambiguous, distant, and tempting to refute. By war’s end, communication channels were so unreliable that soldiers seldom discerned the difference between hearsay and facts. Soldiers who doubted the accuracy of wishful reports were also skeptical of bad news, because it often took weeks to determine the validity of an event.

All these elements persisted, because soldiers encouraged each other’s adherence to them. With revivals and prayer meetings in the trenches, troops sustained their faith that God would deliver independence. As noted in chapter three, Rebels sang music and told atrocity stories that reinforced their perceptions of the enemy. Troops circulated battle reports and rumors that proclaimed Confederate victories. In the final weeks of the war, Confederate regiments and brigades publicly swore their confidence and devotion to the cause. Men who participated in these resolutions confessed that the activity bolstered their spirits. During the surrenders, comrades looked to each other for advice and solidarity. Some of them, like Ham Chamberlayne and David MacIntosh, even fled capitulation together in order to defy the enemy (and reality) a little longer. Camaraderie preserved soldiers’ notions of invincibility to Appomattox and beyond.
1 Blair Burwell to Virginia Beverley (Pickett) Burwell, 8 April 1865, Burwell Family Papers, 1825–1976, VHS.

2 J. W. Hardie and Mrs. L. Hardie to Arthur W. Hyatt, 11 January 1865, Arthur W. Hyatt Papers, LSU.


4 David Pierson to his father, William Pierson, 11 January 1865, in Cutrer and Parrish, eds., *Brothers in Gray*, 222; John Cotton to ??, 20 January 1865, in Lucille Griffith, ed., *Yours Till Death: Civil War Letters of John W. Cotton* (Birmingham, Ala., 1951), 124–25; Henry Berkeley diary, 29 January [sixth quotation], 8 January [seventh, eighth, and ninth quotations] 10 February 1865 [tenth and eleventh quotations], in William H. Runge, ed., *Four Years in the Confederate Artillery: The Diary of Private Henry Robinson Berkeley* (Chapel Hill, 1961), 117, 115, 118; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 7 February [twelfth quotation], 5 February [thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth quotations], 16 February 1865, VHS. Berkeley’s comment regarding his hawkish cousin raises the issue of which group maintained morale longer, soldiers or civilians. Of course, diehards and pessimists existed in both groups. My research on soldiers shows that many of them found ways to sustain their faith in ultimate triumph throughout the war’s final eighteen months. And I agree with historians like Paul Escott who stress the prevalence of dissatisfaction and war weariness among civilians. See Paul D. Escott, *Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge, 1978).

5 Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, 4 January [first quotation], 24 January 1865 [second quotation], in Ann K. Bloomquist and Robert A. Taylor, eds., *This Cruel War: The Civil War Letters of Grant and Malinda Taylor, 1862–1865* (Macon, Ga., 2000), 321, 324. This difference between troops who left the ranks but intended to return and men who deserted the army and its cause has not been stressed enough by historians. Many soldiers reported that their comrades were absent without leave instead of assuming they had deserted. See John Cotton to his wife, 9 January 1865, in Griffith, ed., *Yours Till Death*, 124; and William L. Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 26 January 1865, in William M.

6 Creed Thomas Davis diary, 10 January 1865, VHS; Peter Guarrant to ??, 10 January 1865, Guarrant Family Papers, VHS; James Orr to Sammie Orr, 26 January 1865, in John Q. Anderson, ed., *Campaigning with Parsons' Texas Cavalry Brigade, CSA; The War Journals and Letters of the Four Orr Brothers, 12th Texas Cavalry Regiment* (Hillsboro, Tx., 1967), 155–56.

7 Charles Minor Blackford to Susan Leigh Blackford, 24 March 1865, in Susan Leigh Blackford and Charles Minor Blackford III, eds., *Letters From Lee’s Army: Or Memoirs of Life In and Out of the Army in Virginia During the War Between the States* (Lincoln and London, 1998), 289–90; William James Griggs to cousin Billy, date unknown [but must be winter 1864–1865], Griggs Family Papers, 1861–1865, VHS.

8 Charles Fenton James to Emma James, 13 February 1865, Charles Fenton James Letters, VHS. Of course, troops who returned tardy from a furlough could have invented excuses for extending their liberty, and when James blamed civilians for the soldiers’ actions he was seeking scapegoats. Many scholars, however, have commented on how the Confederate populace seemed to ignore the war and its consequences as the end drew nearer. Extravagant balls and elaborate dinners pervaded Richmond’s social scene during the war’s final months. William W. Heartsill diary, 9 April 1865 [quotation], 24 April 1865, in Wiley, ed., *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army*, 237, 239.


11 Hugh Montgomery to Arthur W. Hyatt, 1 February 1865, Arthur W. Hyatt Papers, LSU.

12 Jared Y. Sanders to “Bessie,” 16 January 1865, Jared Y. Sanders and Family Papers, LSU; Hugh Montgomery to Arthur W. Hyatt, 1 February 1865, Arthur W. Hyatt Papers, LSU. As they had done after the fall of Atlanta, many Confederates first denied the accuracy of bad news in 1865. In Louisiana, Edwin Fay wrote that “we get awful Yankee
accounts down here but I do not begin to believe them. See Edwin Fay to Sarah Shields Fay, 7 January 1865, in Bell Irvin Wiley, ed., *This Infernal War*: *The Confederate Letters of Sgt. Edwin H. Fay* (Austin, Tx., 1958), 411–12. Likewise Frank Adams admitted, “we have been hearing very bad news but I am in hopes it is not true.” See Frank Adams to his sister, 13 January 1865, in Israel L. Adams and Family Papers, LSU.

13 William L. Nugent to Eleanor Smith Nugent, 26 February 1865, in Cash and Howorth, eds., *My Dear Nellie*, 234. Nugent figured that the enemy’s only remaining hope was “to starve us into submission.” John Cotton to ??, 27 January 1865, Griffith, ed., *Yours Till Death*, 127–28; Hugh Montgomery to Arthur W. Hyatt, 24 January 1865, Arthur W. Hyatt Papers, LSU. Also see, Thomas B. Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 28 January 1865, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT. Not everyone believed these rumors. Robert Augustus Stiles dismissed them in a letter to his mother: “do not rely to much on Peace rumors. Hunter, Stephens & Judge Campbell have gone off somewhere, ‘they say’ Washington. Nothing will come of it I fear!” See Robert Augustus Stiles to his mother, 19 January 1865, Robert August Stiles Papers, VHS. Likewise, James Madison Brannock told his wife, “the people here and all along the route [of the Army of Tennessee through Mississippi] are excited on the subject of peace. Every body seems to think we are bound to have it. I hope and pray it may be so, but I am not very sanguine about it.” See James Madison Brannock to Sarah Caroline (Gwin) Brannock, 8 February 1865, James Madison Brannock Papers, VHS.


15 Charles Fenton James to Emma A. James, 7 February 1865, Charles Fenton James Letters, VHS; Thomas J. Key diary, 21 February 1865, in Wirt Armstead Cate, ed., *Two Soldiers: The Campaign Diaries of Thomas J. Key, C. S. A., December 7, 1863–May 17, 1865, and Robert J. Campbell. U. S. A., January 1, 1864–July 21, 1864* (Chapel Hill, 1938), 195; Ham Chamberlayne to his mother, 13 February 1865, in Chamberlayne, ed., *Ham Chamberlayne*, 308–09. The quotation about Richmond citizens meeting is from the Edward Crenshaw diary, 9 February 1865, “Diary of Edward Crenshaw,” 377. At the meeting Confederate Secretary of State Judah Benjamin advocated arming the slaves and allowing the central government to take possession of all resources that could help the Confederacy gain independence. Creed Thomas Davis diary, 3 February 1865, VHS; James W. Albright diary, 4 February 1865, VHS; Edwin Fay diary, 19 February 1865, in Wiley, ed., “This Infernal War,” 427; Thomas B. Hampton to Jéstin Hampton, 3 February 1865, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT; William W. Heartstil diary, 10 March 1865, in Wiley, ed., *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army*, 232; Richard Launcelot Maury Diary, 5 February 1865, VHS.

16 Creed Thomas Davis diary, 8 February 1865, VHS; George Marion Coiner to “Kate,” 6 February 1865, Coiner Family Papers, VHS; Edward Crenshaw diary, 5 February 1865, “Diary of Captain Edward Crenshaw,” 376.


19 Resolutions Adopted by the Staunton Artillery, February 1st, 1865.

20 Resolutions Adopted by Bratton’s Brigade, South Carolina Volunteers; Resolutions Adopted by Company "H," "I," and "K," Thirteenth Virginia Infantry, January 28, 1865; Resolutions Passed at a Meeting of the 14th Virginia Infantry; Resolutions Adopted by Humphrey’s Mississippi Brigade, Army of Northern Virginia, February 3, 1865; Resolutions Passed at a Meeting of the Ninth Virginia Infantry; William W. Heartsill diary, 13 May 1865, in Wiley, ed., Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army, 233. Heartsill’s resolutions, which also vowed to cross the Mississippi and aid eastern comrades in the struggle, were not unanimously adopted by his unit, the W. P. Rangers. Thirty men signed and thirty-one refused. This is most likely due to two factors: the resolutions were drafted only weeks before capitulation; and western troops were often unwilling to cross the river and fight in the East.

21 Resolutions Adopted by McGowan's Brigade, South Carolina Volunteers; Resolutions Adopted by Humphrey's Mississippi Brigade, Army of Northern Virginia, February 3, 1865; Resolutions Passed at a Meeting of the Ninth Virginia Infantry; Resolutions Passed at a Meeting of the 14th Virginia Infantry; Resolutions Adopted by the Officers and Men of the 57th Virginia Regiment; Resolutions Adopted by Bratton's Brigade, South Carolina Volunteers. Also see, Resolutions Adopted by Company "H," "I," and "K," Thirteenth Virginia Infantry, January 28, 1865: "we ridicule, as absurd, the idea of reconstruction; for we believe re-union would subject us again to the government of that sectional majority which is confined to the abolition States, and which is alike a stranger
to our institutions, feelings and habits of thought as a people, and foreign to our territory."

22 Resolutions Adopted by Bratton's Brigade, South Carolina Volunteers; Resolutions Adopted by Company "H," "I" and "K" Thirteenth Virginia Infantry, January 28, 1865; Resolutions Adopted by McGowan's Brigade, South Carolina Volunteers; Resolutions Adopted by the Officers and Men of the 57th Virginia Regiment.

23 Resolutions Adopted by Humphrey's Mississippi Brigade, Army of Northern Virginia, February 3, 1865; Resolutions Passed at a Meeting of the Ninth Virginia Infantry; Resolutions Adopted by the Officers and Men of the 57th Virginia Regiment; Resolutions Adopted by Bratton's Brigade, South Carolina Volunteers; Resolutions Passed at a Meeting of the 14th Virginia Infantry.

24 Charles Fenton James to Emma A. James, 7 February [first, second, and third quotations], 9 February 1865 [fourth and fifth quotations], Charles Fenton James Letters, VHS; Edwin Fay diary, 4 March 1865, in Cate, ed., Two Soldiers, 199; Fred Fleet to his mother, 2 February 1865, in Fleet and Fuller, eds., Green Mount, 359. The fact that the soldiers knew their resolutions would be read aloud in the Confederate Congress and printed in newspapers raises the issue of how the troops wanted to present themselves to a national audience. Because their public sentiments matched the private expressions of confidence I found in letters and diaries, I am not questioning the sincerity of these resolutions. Nevertheless, the passion that exudes resolutions reflected both the emotionally charged atmosphere in which the vows were drafted and the knowledge that they were written for the eyes of the country.

25 Lt. J. W. Hardie & Mrs. L. Hardie to Arthur W. Hyatt, 11 January 1865, Arthur W. Hyatt Papers, LSU; Thomas B. Hampton to Jestin Hampton, 26 February 1865, Thomas B. Hampton Letters, UT.

26 Thomas Key diary, 10 March 1865, in Cate, ed., Two Soldiers, 200; Rawleigh William Downman to Mary Alice (Maegruder) Downman, 18 March 1865, Downman Family Papers, VHS; Richard Launcelot Maury Diary, 10 March 1865, VHS.

27 James Keith to Sarah Agnes (Blackwell) Keith, Keith Family Papers, 1821–1916, VHS; J. William Jones, Christ in the Camp or Religion in Lee's Army (Richmond, 1887), 353; James Silver, Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1957), 55; Richard Launcelot Maury diary, 28 March 1865, VHS; Creed Thomas Davis diary, 5 January 1865, VHS; Robert Augustus Stiles to his mother, 19 January 1865, Robert Augustus Stiles Papers, VHS.

28 Richard Launcelot Maury diary, 8 March [first quotation], 5 February [second quotation], 11 February [third and fourth quotations], 24 February [fifth quotation], 28 February [sixth quotation], 20 March 1865 [seventh and eighth quotations], VHS.
Richard Launcelot Maury diary, 24 February [first through third quotations], 20 February [fourth through seventh quotations], 9 March 1865 [ninth quotation], VHS.


John Walters diary, 4 April [first quotation], 5 April [second and third quotations], 6 April 1865 [fourth through sixth quotations], in *ibid.*, 219–221.

Raleigh William Downman to Mary Alice (Macgruder) Downman, 6 April 1865, Downman Family Papers, VHS.

Cornelius Hart Carlton diary, 4–8 April 1865, VHS; Giles Buckner Cooke diary, 6 April 1865, VHS. Lee quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 848. Also see, James W. Albright diary, 6 April 1865, VHS; and David Gregg McIntosh diary, 6 April 1865, David Gregg McIntosh Papers, VHS.


David Gregg MacIntosh, 9 April 1865, VHS. MacIntosh’s account, like most soldiers diaries at the very end of the war, might have been written from memory when he returned home. It is impossible to know for certain but perhaps telling that his entries were written in the past tense at this point. Ham Chamberlayne to Edward Pye Chamberlayne and Lucy Parke (Chamberlayne) Bagby, 12 April [fifth and sixth quotations], and Ham Chamberlayne to Lucy Parke (Chamberlayne) Bagby, 21 April 1865, in Chamberlayne, ed., *Ham Chamberlayne—Virginian*, 320–21, 325. Perhaps men like MacIntosh and Chamberlayne were posturing when they fled capitulation to continue the fight. They might have understood that the end had come and wanted to stake their claim as the last Rebels standing. This might explain the boastful tone of their writing. But it is just as likely that they could not bear surrendering. Moreover, it is difficult to believe that Chamberlayne rode all the way to Mississippi in the spring of 1865 (as he did) simply to prove his undying devotion to the cause.
39 James W. Albright diary, undated entry but probably a postwar recollection, VHS; John Walters diary, 11 April 1865, in Wiley, ed., Norfolk Blues, 226. Also see John Bell Vincent Diary, 10–12 April 1865, VHS. Vincent went through the motions of stacking arms and receiving Federal rations, but he remained "in camp in suspense of what is our final destiny." Though Grant's terms allowed them to go home, many Confederates feared that the Federal government would punish them.

40 Joseph Bryan to John Randolph Bryan, 6 April 1865, Bryan Family Papers, 1774–1942, VHS; Mosby's address copied in Frederick Fillison Bowen Papers, VHS.


42 Samuel T. Foster diary, 19 April [first quotation], 24 April [second quotation], 22 April 1865 [third, fourth, and fifth quotations], in Ibid., 165–67.

43 Edgeworth Bird to Saida Bird, 26 April 1865, in Rozier, ed., Granite Farm Letters, 247; George Mercer diary, 16 April 1865, in Mills Lane, ed., Times that Prove People's Principles: Civil War in Georgia (Savannah, Ga., 1993), 252–53.

44 Edwin Leet to Sarah Leet, 26 April 1865, Leet Letters, 1864–1865, LSU; Charles Andry to his father, 24 April 1865, Michel Thomassin Andry and Family Papers, LSU.

45 Louis A. Bringier to his wife, 23 April 1865, Louis A. Bringier and Family Papers, LSU; David Pierson to William Pierson, 27 April 1865, in Cutrer and Parrish, eds., Brothers in Gray, 256–57.

46 William W. Heartsill diary, 16 April, 19 April [first through fourth quotations], 20 April 1865 [fifth through eighth quotations], in Wiley, ed., Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army, 238–39.

47 William W. Heartsill diary, 7 May [first quotation], 13 May [second quotation], 7 May [third quotation], 11 May 1865 [fourth and fifth quotations], in Ibid., 241–43; Jared Y. Sanders to Bessie Sanders, 11 May 1865, Jared Y. Sanders and Family Papers, LSU.


49 Foote, Civil War, v. 3, 1019–21.
Chapter Seven

The Aftermath of Invincibility

When Johnny comes marching home again,
Hurrah, hurrah!
We'll give him a hearty welcome then,
Hurrah, hurrah!
The men will cheer, the boys will shout,
The ladies, they will all turn out,
And we'll all feel gay when Johnny comes marching home.¹

Patrick Gilmore's song, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," encapsulated Confederate visions of the war's outcome. Their dreams of going home as victors buoyed troops' spirits when the war worsened. As the song relates, a spontaneous procession welcomed Johnny at the outskirts of town. With joy and fanfare, people who had known him since childhood whisked him through the village. Church bells pealed. A laurel wreath crowned his brow. Throngs of women vied for his attention. The whole town honored and thanked him for his service and sacrifices. It was to be the happiest and proudest event of Johnny's life.

But reality mocked the Confederate dream. While veterans walked or rode home as bands of survivors, the scenes of their fantasy were being played out in northern towns, and a colossal review of smart-stepping victors marched through Washington D.C. Uncertainty not resolution marked Rebels' final journey as soldiers. Though the military surrenders had been quiet and even respectful, Confederates feared retribution from the government they had defied and the millions they had enslaved. Many soldiers summed up scenarios of confiscation, disfranchisement, imprisonment, and miscegenation in one word: subjugation. Jared Saunders admitted that the "unknown horrors of subjugation" caused him so much anxiety that his hair was turning gray. The abstractions of a barbaric
enemy that had steeled Rebel resolve during the war now spawned terrible images for the future. Samuel Foster recorded his comrades’ predictions as they trekked toward Texas:

Some think that all the officers will be courtmartialed, some think they will be banished out of the country. . . . Nearly every one deplores the death of Lincoln and believes that he would have been the best man for us now. That thing[s] would have been different if he had lived. Some go so far as to say that perhaps we were wrong, and that the negro ought to have been freed at the start off. While others are still not whipped and evince a determination to fight it out some way, or leave the country, rather than go back into the Union, and be ruled by them; and have to be ground to death by being rob[b]ed of all our negroes, and lands and other property—not allowed to Vote nor hold office any more. We do not suppose, nor expect to be allowed to vote any more, as long as we live. We also expect that all the lands in the Confederacy, will be taken away from the white people to pay their war expenses then given in small 160 acre lots to the negroes.

As Foster’s diary suggests, many Confederates expected a future that was darker than their worst wartime experiences. Everything they had fought to prevent, all the nightmarish speculations they had read in editorials and political addresses, every enemy atrocity they had heard, threatened their horizon.

Many soldiers responded to the psychological trauma of defeat by holding on to military customs and comrades. Amidst so much uncertainty, they coveted order, unity, and familiarity. In late May, Junius Bragg watched his division disband as units rather than dissolve as individuals and mobs. One day, 186 troops “formed in an old field” near their camp in Marshall, Texas, “and marched away in order with loaded guns.” The next night, “about eight hundred men from the Division left. . . . They went in a body and well armed.” Bragg counted 132 men and officers left in his regiment—“they will, of course, go in small squads,” he remarked. Kentuckian Johnny Jackman’s regiment met in Augusta, Georgia, to decide as a group the best route home. After considering going by
water from Savannah, they took free passage on railroad cars that the Federal government furnished them. Northerner Whitelaw Reid rode the cars with them and observed how the destruction that scarred the passing countryside also marked the veterans’ faces:

“Aimless young men in gray, ragged and filthy, seemed, with the downfall of the Rebellion they had fought for, to have lost their object in life, and stared stupidly at the clothes and comfortable air of officers and strangers from the North.”

Other troops vented rage and a sense of entitlement. Thousands of veterans who had suffered squalor for their country stole whatever they needed from Confederate and state storehouses. “I lived four years on goobers, parched corn and rotten meat,” one soldier explained, “and I saw nothing wrong with taking blankets & such from the commissary as they would have been confiscated anyhow by the Yankees when they arrived.” But some “confiscation” was disorderly and indiscriminate. Scores of armed veterans sacked Thomasville, Georgia, in early May. They stole horses, carried off between 75,000 and 125,000 pounds of corn, destroyed books and furniture, and threatened to burn the town. A New Orleans reporter noted, “ex-confederate soldiers have fought four years without pay, and now they propose to pay themselves.” Though most troops looted government property first, they also deprived and terrorized civilians throughout the South. With hundreds of miles before them and an empty haversack, many veterans had no choice but to seek sustenance and shelter from people in their path. But some men took more than their hosts could afford to give. Eliza Andrews, a young Georgia woman, watched as soldiers seized her neighbors’ horses in broad daylight. One veteran led a mule away from its pleading owner without a trace of compunction. As he
passed Andrews, the soldier asked, "A man that's going to Texas must have a mule to ride, don't you think so lady?"^4

Some Confederates fled rather than face the impact of defeat, emancipation, and reunion. The rugged expanse across the Rockies attracted many Rebels. Enough Confederates headed to Texas after the war to make it the most populous state in the South by 1880. Still others preferred to leave the country altogether. On July 4, 1865, General Jo Shelby sunk his battle flag in the Rio Grande and led several hundred cavalymen into Mexico. One historian has estimated that as many as eight to ten thousand Confederates settled in Latin America after the war. Expatriates became filibusters or entrepreneurs in mining operations and coffee plantations south of the equator. Some veterans even joined the Egyptian Army. For these Rebels, exile in the most alien cultures was preferable to living as a conquered people.^5

But millions of Confederates stayed in the South and used their war memories to forge a regional identity that was as distinctive and defiant as their antebellum slave culture. The seeds of postwar opposition and Lost Cause mythology germinated in Rebels' experiences as hardened soldiers who had convinced themselves they could not be conquered by Yankees and blacks. Faith in the invincibility of their arms, valor, and cause—convictions seared into the mentalities of thousands of southern men during their formative years—shaped their peculiar postwar identity as unconquered losers. Undaunted by capitulation, white southern men continued their military struggle in the social and political theaters of Reconstruction. By century's end, white southerners erased many of the political, social, and economic advances blacks had achieved since emancipation, and Jim Crow began a reign of segregation and terror that would last
another sixty years. Confederates also wrote the first histories of the conflict to ensure that the “truth” survived. Historian David Blight has described their efforts as “one of the most highly orchestrated grassroots partisan histories ever conceived.” Jefferson Davis himself wrote a two volume, 1,279-page memoir entitled *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*. This movement in print elevated Confederate troops and their leaders to epic stature and argued that overwhelming numbers and artless industrialism rather than Union superiority won the war for the United States. Moreover, the authors minimized slavery’s role in the contest and linked their cause with Christian virtues and the legacy of the American Revolution. The Lost Cause myth depicted a righteous, immaculate Confederacy that was crucified by the evil forces it opposed. Advocates cried, “the South will rise again” and intended the parallel to Christ’s resurrection. When the trauma of defeat faded and the war generation died, sentimentalism, white supremacy, and the work of southern women sustained the veterans’ worldview and culture deep into the twentieth century.6

Today the South remains the most self-conscious region in the country. The memory of defeat, devastation, and occupation differentiates white southerners from other Americans even after Vietnam. But while this experience separates the region from the rest of the United States, it connects white southerners to people throughout the world who suffered similar calamities. In a global perspective, other Americans are distinctive, because they have not been beaten and occupied by enemies. Thus, the Confederate culture of invincibility offers American historians a glimpse at both the conditions that sometimes veil defeat from the vanquished and the reactions of diehards who never fathomed surrender until it happened. Comparisons between Confederates and the
German ranks of World War One or Japanese troops of the Second World War might reveal how people of diverse religions, societies, and political philosophies exhibit similar convictions of being unconquerable. Perhaps the answer lies in certain elements that all soldiers share: the immaturity of youth, cultural and gender expectations, national obligations, the chaos of warfare, and the burden of failure.7

A mixture of three factors shaped Confederates’ faith in their invincibility: the environment of warfare, the qualities of white southern culture, and the mechanics of group psychology. First, the “fog of war” obscured reality. Combatants seldom grasped the sum of battles they fought let alone comprehended the developments of entire campaigns. Wishful rumors further distorted the facts and influenced how soldiers envisioned the conflict and its outcome. Moreover, the war tested troops’ endurance before the eyes of hundreds of men from home and thousands of anonymous peers. Camaraderie, often considered a positive bond in soldiers’ lives, provided social compulsions that pushed Rebels to greater sacrifices in the presence of friends. Immersed in a culture that prized honor and masculinity, Confederates outdid each other in showing their devotion to the cause and their faith in victory. Remaining optimistic while they marched barefoot, ate parched corn, and sustained wounds was the mark of a veteran, and thousands of young Confederates strove to acquire that status. By stressing how the war’s context encouraged Rebel hopefulness, we grasp how the soldiers’ convictions were “thinkable” and widespread.

Second, white southern culture nurtured Confederate notions of invincibility. Drawing from antebellum religious inheritances, soldiers believed that God favored white southerners and would deliver Confederate independence when the time was right.
Christianity provided a partisan interpretation for Rebel victories and setbacks: triumphs proved God’s favor and His presence among Confederate legions; defeats confirmed God’s love with His chastening of Rebels for their sins. Using this perspective, many soldiers convinced themselves they could not lose. Moreover, troops borrowed sectional stereotypes, particularly the Cavalier myth, to depict the enemy as inept and barbaric. Because these abstractions helped soldiers distance themselves from the people they killed, the caricatures withstood evidence that exhibited northern strength and valor. In short, Rebels’ religious convictions and views of the enemy upheld white southerners’ confidence in their cultural superiority. To the end of the war, this faith confirmed Confederates’ right to nationhood and assured them of success. By focusing on how culture encouraged Rebels’ sense of invincibility, we see how the war they thought and fought emanated from white southern reservoirs of meaning.

Finally, because the soldiers’ world was emotional as well as cognitive, psychology can clarify how thousands of Rebels convinced themselves they were unconquerable. As historian Peter Gay has explained, “psychoanalysis, like history, concentrates on understanding the past, works to make illegible clues legible, and digs beneath surfaces to hidden layers obscured and distorted by the passage of time, or by the writers’—or the public’s—need to deny unpleasant truths.” Confederates’ self-absorption with their culture, cause, and imminent triumph prolonged the war and obscured the likelihood of defeat. In many ways, Confederate nationalism—indeed all nationalisms—can be seen as a collective form of narcissism: the Rebels favored themselves so much that they separated from and fought fellow Americans in order to preserve their identity. As writer Michael Ignatieff put it, “nationalism is a distorting mirror in which believers
see their simple ethnic, religious, or territorial attributes transformed into glorious . . . qualities.” But in the end, the narcissism that animated Confederate nationalism contributed to its downfall. Just as Narcissus gazed at his reflection while he wasted away, Confederates admired their cultural attributes while their nation faded into oblivion. Thousands of diehards claimed God’s favor, praised their armies, discounted the enemy, and resolved to win instead of facing the portents of defeat: deficient supplies and manpower, worthless currency, international isolation, the disintegration of slavery, Union strength and determination, and Rebel disaffection within the ranks and at home. By revealing the psychological underpinnings of Confederate optimism, we avoid the impulse to dismiss their hopes as irrational and comprehend how their passions informed reality.8

The myth of Narcissus offers a fitting conclusion. Ovid wrote: “In time, / the nymph brought forth a son, an amazingly pretty boy, / whom she named Narcissus. For this, her baby, she came to / inquire / of the blind seer how he would live, and what fullness of years / he might expect. The prophet replied: ‘He will live long, / if he does not know himself.’ Absurd? Or a mystery? No one / could understand or explain what his answer meant. But the truth / came out in its own good time, in his life and peculiar death.” Likewise, the meaning and effects of Rebel culture can be found in the rise and peculiar defeat of the Confederacy. By linking the soldiers’ world, culture, and dreams together, we discern why a people on the brink of surrender expected victory and how the calamitous end impacted their future.9
1 Patrick S. Gilmore, a bandmaster in the Union army, wrote “When Johnny Comes Marching Home” in 1863. Like many Civil War songs, it was popular with both sides.


6 David Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2001), 259. For more scholarship on the Lost Cause, see Paul M. Gaston, The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking (New York, 1970); Rollin G. Osterweis, The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865–1900 (Hamden, Conn., 1973); Charles Reagan Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920 (Athens, Ga., 1980); Gaines Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913 (New York, 1987); and William C. Davis, The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy (Lawrence, Ks., 1996). Gaston’s definition of myth is instructive: “Myths . . . are not polite euphemisms for falsehoods, but are combinations of images and symbols that reflect a people’s way of perceiving truth. Organically related to a fundamental reality of life, they fuse the real and the imaginary into a blend that becomes a reality itself, a force in history” (9).

7 C. Vann Woodward, The Burden of Southern History (Baton Rouge, 1960). John Dower’s work on the Pacific War and Japan’s reaction to defeat offers promising contrasts to the Confederate experience. See his War Without Mercy: Race And Power in the Pacific War (New York, 1986); and Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II (New York, 1999). It must not be forgotten that Native Americans experienced terrible defeats over centuries of time, but their circumstances were very different from the Confederates’ fate.
8 Peter Gay, “Psychoanalysis and the Historian,” in Michael S. Roth, ed., *Freud: Conflict and Culture* (New York, 1998), 118; Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (London, 1998), 51. Charles Royster has shown that Unionists and Confederates valued their cultures so highly that they “saw no need to weigh the cost of violence in the balance against their purposes and interests.” Certain of their own superiority, both sides sought “to triumph through inflicting and sustaining casualties so great as to overawe the enemy.” See Royster, *The Destructive War*, 256. For Sigmund Freud’s efforts to connect his work on the individual psyche to group mentality, see James Strachey’s authorized translation of Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (London, 1949).

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