

Schools of Citizenship

Allegiance, Obligation & State Formation in the Confederate Army, 1861-65

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In the United States, as in most republics, the figure of the citizen-soldier carries an extraordinary, almost elemental power. Soldiers deepen the meaning of national citizenship by making their sacrifice the ultimate gift citizens that can offer to the nation-state. At the same time, the sacrifice of soldiers creates a hierarchy of citizenship, erecting high barriers which make it difficult for those whose race or gender has historically prevented them from proving the full measure of their loyalty. And long after a conflict has ended, the shadow of the citizen-soldier lingers. Soldiers memorialized by statues in town squares and city parks are more than just sites where people remember those who have fallen. They are sites where citizens are meant to remember the sacrifice which is sometimes required to ensure the safety and stability of the nation, commemorating the soldier and the legitimacy of the state in a single, complex whole.

Statues and memorials to the citizen-soldier litter the landscape of those republics born in the Age of Revolution. In France, the most pervasive symbol of the First Republic is that of the sansculottes: rural peasants and urban laborers who became central figures lionized in grand history paintings to commemorate the French Revolution. The citizen-soldier also dominates the

iconography of revolution in America. Popular mythology has it that common men of meager means, unused to the discipline and rigor of the military, defeated the British imperial army at the height of its power, with little more than their determination and wits.¹ In modern American politics, candidates running for office from state representative to President must, at some point, contend with the question of where they were and what they did when America was at war. Up until 2008, every presidential candidate since World War II has had to deal with questions about their service to the nation during wartime and the reasons for this are clear. American ideas about leadership are fundamentally tied up not only with being a soldier, but also with ideas about what that service teaches an individual about being a citizen.

But if the history of the United States is at least in part a story of conflict over the definition of what and, more importantly, who counts as a citizen, the American Civil War and the emancipation of over four million black slaves complicated the symbol of the citizen-soldier immeasurably. During the war and particularly in the years thereafter, many northerners wondered aloud about what it meant that so many thousands of southern men had pledged their allegiance to fight for a rival nation-state. If the Union prevailed, would these men become loyal American citizens once more? This question was more than a passing thought without consequence. Confederate policies by the middle stages of the war had turned military camps into hotbeds of nationalist fervor, realigning the obligations of a rural populace which had, before the war, lived within a complex of local allegiances in counties throughout the American South. As part of a massive project of state-building, the Confederacy dissolved these bonds of

¹ For studies of republican symbol in the French context, see Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and, for a study that situates the Sansculottes in republican ideology, see E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848*, reprint, 1962 (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 53–76. For the importance of the citizen-soldier in the American context, see Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Year's War* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1984) and Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783*, reprint, 1979 (New York: Norton, 1981). For a more theoretical understanding of the relationship between citizenship and military service, see Ronald Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

local obligation, extracting the allegiance of white southern men and holding them up as the ultimate citizens of the nation.

As part of a larger project which examines the history of allegiance in the United States between the end of slavery and the waning days of Reconstruction, this paper examines how the Confederate nation turned their military into a massive school for the training of citizen-soldiers, by focusing on the conflict of allegiance that sprung up as the Confederate state attempted to modernize, rationalize and centralize its power over its military. Following white southerners as they made their way out of their local communities and into the army, this paper looks closely at the social spaces of the army camp, which the Confederacy turned into social spaces which trained and tested individual allegiance: spaces wherein the Confederate state memorialized the loyal soldier, while at the same time perfecting tools of harsh reprisal for those disloyal men who did not live up to their obligations. The army camp, the muster, the parade ground, the court-martial and the makeshift religious gatherings that dominated the day-to-day life of the soldier, ordered the lives of men who experienced the chaos of modern armed conflict, but they served a political purpose as well, as sites of cultural production wherein citizenship was both learned and tested.

More than thirty years ago, historian Eugen Weber argued that French army camps in the mid to late nineteenth century were central sites in a process of socialization that made French citizens out of the men who were born and grew up in small rural communities in the countryside. A world away from Paris and the dominant symbols of French republicanism, conscription and compulsory military service socialized peasants to become agents of the state. A cornerstone of the French Republic, the national army served as an important political and military resource. But it was also a organization that schooled rural Frenchmen in the habits and traditions of republican citizenship.² In a much more intense way and over the course of a much

² Eugen Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 292–302 (quote on 298).

shorter period of time, a similar process took place between many southern men and the Confederate nation-state.

Looking at Confederate army camps and at the American Civil War in this way poses a whole host of questions about the way that scholars write about states, citizens and nationalism. The more recent literature on nationalism—largely a product of the “cultural turn” and the identity politics of the past three decades—has emerged as a powerful theoretical paradigm which has brushed a more sophisticated gloss over the historian’s effort to narrate the nation-state.³ Focusing our attention on the cultural products, the language and the performances of national pride which, scholars argue, fostered national sentiment in countries throughout the world in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the age of the nation-state was built over top of multiple “imagined communities.”⁴

But for all that this study of cultural nationalism has done to force a re-thinking of older literature, this body of work and the “imagined community” paradigm from which it has drawn so much of its interpretive power, has for the most part neglected larger questions about the

³. Any discussion of “imagined communities” invariably draws on the work of Benedict Anderson, whose oft-cited work has provided historians in a variety of fields with a useful framework, through which to examine nation-building as a cultural, and therefore, negotiated process. Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. and exp. (London and New York: Verso, 1991). An attention paid to nationalism as a historical process, rather than the natural outgrowth of popular sentiment, derives some explanatory power from the historicizing of traditions, as evidenced in E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, reprint, 1983 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁴. For their part, historians of the American South have put Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities” to particularly good use, though in the wider body of literature on the Confederate States of America, cultural studies of nationalism actually have a lineage that pre-dates Anderson. See, for example, John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830–1860* (New York: Norton, 1979). Among the best studies that focus more on high politics and nation-building, see E. Merton Coulter, *The Confederate States of America, 1861–1865*, vol. 7 of *A History of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950); Avery O. Craven, *The Growth of Southern Nationalism, 1848–1861*, vol. 6 of *A History of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953); Clement Eaton, *A History of the Southern Confederacy* (New York: Macmillan, 1954); Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971) and *The Confederate Nation, 1861–1865* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). Work more directly influenced by Anderson includes Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) and Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861–1868* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Finally, critics of Anderson have offered a much-needed note of caution. They include Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 149–79.

connections between citizens and states. By examining the experiences of Confederate soldiers as the product of an education southerners received while in the Confederate Army, citizenship in the Confederacy appears less as the culmination of an “imagined community” and more as an intentional, designed process which realigned the allegiances of a rural people away from one another and towards the structure of a modern state.

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In the spring of 1862, Jefferson Davis sent a letter to the highest ranking officer in the Confederate Army, instructing Gen. Joseph E. Johnston to think more carefully about the local and regional alliances of those Mississippians serving in the army he commanded. Organizing all Mississippians into the same brigade would, Davis offered, make the soldiers from his home state “more effective in battle for being thus associated.” As a directive from the President of the Confederacy to the nation’s highest military commander, Davis’ counsel to Johnston was something more than a gentle suggestion. Written in the immediate aftermath of a heated debate that resulted in the first conscript act ever passed in North America, the political implications of a massive expansion of the Confederate state that conscription allowed, were both unclear and potentially revolutionary. For a President who hailed from Mississippi, Davis understood the necessity of moving slowly and not allowing his military commanders to flex the muscles of a newly emboldened national government too much or too quickly. To do otherwise would upset an already fragile political coalition which had, in the span of barely two years, agreed to the massive enlargement of a government which had been founded on the conviction that the best state was the smallest state possible.⁵

⁵ Jefferson Davis to Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, Richmond VA, 26 May 1862, in *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Gov’t Printing Office, 1880), ser. 1, vol. 11, part 3, 546-47 (hereafter *O.R.*). Any study of the Confederate state must grapple with the important work of Emory Thomas and Richard Bensel. Thomas set the terms for this debate in *Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience*, 58–78, with Bensel adding a comparative dimension in *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859–1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 94–237. This chapter builds on the insights of both scholars, who argue that necessity brought about a massive centralization of the Confederate state, to prosecute a modern war against an industrializing power, while focusing more on the social, cultural and political implications of this process, as it impacted understandings of power and authority among Confederate

Mobilized quickly and according to the traditions of the local militia with which most nineteenth century Americans were familiar, the Confederate Army prior to conscription was a patchwork quilt of regiments, filled with volunteers who understood the term of their service as lasting twelve months from the date they were mustered. Though the initial call for volunteers was in keeping with the ideological foundations of a nation built on the stated principle of limited government and state's rights—not to mention a wider feeling among most Confederates that the war would be over by the end of the year—the initial organization of the Confederate Army posed significant problems from the outset. In a region dominated by the will of slaveholders, the building of an army required that the Confederacy acquiesce to regional demands and the whim of local political structures. Rather than create a new base of political power, the Confederacy's authority was dependent upon these local allegiances and local political obligations which had knit white southern communities together. Only by relying on localities could a new state ever hope to mobilize men in the nation's defense. Confederate authorities had to be content with armed men fighting for the nation in the field, in whatever form local communities chose to offer them.

In the frenzy of organization that followed Lincoln's election and secession, individual states began to expand existing armies of militia. As a whole, these militia regiments were a decidedly disorganized bunch: poorly drilled groups often with only partially completed muster rolls and most lacking the weapons to fight or the materiel to live as soldiers. Regardless of their fitness or organization, those who could be mustered were sworn into the Confederate Army, first as part of a call for 100,000 men in the spring of 1861 and later in an additional call for 400,000 troops, made later that August. Even though its army boasted a fighting force of over three hundred thousand volunteers by the end of that year, the structure of authority embedded within its armed forces made the prerogative of the national government subservient to local

soldiers.

power.⁶

Nowhere was this more apparent than in Mississippi. Its state militia was an important, if haphazard, cultural and political institution, with organizations of varied sophistication in every region of the state. But as a system to organize and train soldiers en masse, Mississippi's militia system showed the weakness of a decade's long financial and organizational neglect by the state government and it proved a particularly poor system for the organization of a Confederate Army. Because the state government lacked the funds to pay for the enlistment of troops, the vast majority of regiments were led by men who either had the wealth to equip their companies, or the connections to families and friends in the region who could. Lacking clear stipulations about their terms of service, or even the process by which companies would be accepted into the state militia, rumor abounded. The experience of George F. Cranford was typical. Hailing from Grenada in the northwestern part of the state, Cranford wrote Mississippi's Governor John Pettus, to ask for clarifications about the regulations surrounding the enlistment of men. "I have not seen the New Military Law & consequently know nothing of its provisions," wrote Cranford:

Our Captain (W.S. Statham Esq.) explain[ed] is provisions to me an that all who are 'mustered in'; under the Law are to be considered as enlisted for 20 years in the Army of Miss., *subject* at any time during this 20 years to be called out or punished as *deserters* for leaving the State. Our Company seems unwilling to enlist for so long a time, especially as a deserter's death is to be penalty of going from one state to another. The Company is, however, I believe, perfectly willing to enlist for one year, subject to all the rules & regulations of war.

Cranford's letter reflected some larger problems of organization. Enlistment in the army carried with it obligations on the part of soldiers to cement their allegiances not to the state of Mississippi or the Confederacy, but instead to the officer who enlisted them. But to correct this problem was to upset the preparation for war. State and indeed national Confederate leaders ran the risk of dampening the enthusiasm for enlistment if they refused to accept regiments into the

⁶ On the initial efforts of Confederate military organization, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 316–21 and David J. Eicher, *The Longest Night: A Military History of the Civil War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 58.

service, even if doing so meant accepting officers and enlisted men who had their own ideas about what enlisting meant.⁷

This diminutive role for the state in the organization of a military was particularly apparent in the process which turned soldiers into officers. The act of electing officers was a pivotal part of the political ritual that surrounded the local militia in the antebellum period. In the same way that *vida voce* elections provided candidates with public demonstrations of who was a friend and who was the enemy of a particular candidate on election day, officer elections offered the opportunity for the men of the county to bestow an honor on a local man who was often someone of wealth and distinction.

Given its importance as a ritual of power, it was only natural that soldiers in 1861 retain the right of electing the men who would lead them into battle.⁸ And the committee of men organized by Mississippi's state legislature to oversee the organization and regulation of the enlistment effort agreed, offering a report in February 1861 which outlined the process of how officers would be elected. In an attempt to avoid the potential fracture of an open voting process, officer elections were to be completed by ballot and organized by two officers. Candidates for the position had to secure the majority of votes cast to be declared the winner, and without elected officers in place, the state could not muster the company or regiment as an active fighting force. With these stipulations in place, the chaotic process of enlistment carried with it the

⁷ *Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson: Mississippian Book and Job Printing Office), 10-11; George F. Cranford to Hon. J.J. Pettus, Grenada MS, 26 February 1861, Folder 5, Box 931 (roll #2); W.E. Kendall to Gov. Pettus, Ocean Springs MS, 10 September 1861, Folder 7, Box 939 (roll #4); D.N. Cooper to His Excellency John Jones Pettus, Guntown MS, 23 May 1861, Folder 5, Box 932 (roll #3); D.N. Cooper to Gov. Pettus, Fulton MS, 3 June 1861, Folder 6, Box 932 (roll #3), Ser. 757: Governor John Jones Pettus, Correspondence and Papers, 1859-1863 and Undated (hereafter Pettus Correspondence), Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter MDAH).

⁸ While studies of Civil War soldiers often mention the practice, few have delved more deeply into the political implications of soldiers voting. When they have, they have invariably emphasized the political practices and sentiments of soldiers and their participation in national political debates, rather than the more quotidian practice of politics evident in officer elections. For the literature on this question, see Josiah Henry Benton, *Voting in the Field: A Forgotten Chapter of the Civil War* (Boston: Priv. Printed, 1915); Joseph Allan Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998) and Joseph Allan Frank and Barbara Duteau, "Measuring the Political Articulatness of United States Civil War Soldiers: The Wisconsin Militia," *Journal of Military History* 64, no. 1 (January 2000): 53-77.

understanding that local companies of men would elect the “best men” to positions of a higher rank.

With social status trumping a candidate’s experience at being a soldier, officer elections proved a difficult pill to swallow for those who believed that what the Mississippi and the Confederate military as a whole needed in a time of war were experienced men in positions of authority. William Trotter wrote to Pettus, expressing amazement that officers elected to head regiments lacked even the most rudimentary understanding of military discipline and drill:

I have frequently been surprised to see men who could not even rank and size a company or go through the Manual exercise with a musket, seeking high military offices, where the lives of thousands might be sacrificed to their ignorance are all now about entering upon a war in which we shall have able and experienced officers to contend against and it will require the most able and experienced men we have to contend against them and our officers.

An older man who could remember a time when the state militia was a much more well-trained, territorial force on the American borderlands, Trotter made it clear to Pettus that unless the state wrote new regulations making military experience paramount in the selection of officers and service in the militia compulsory for every male between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, the army would remain an undisciplined mess.⁹

Officer elections, the time-honored symbols of the local militia, the fierce attachment to friends (real or political) and the belief that what mattered in war was the protection of one’s home and family, were all rituals and traditions which the mobilization effort dropped wholesale into the Confederate Army. And though newspaper editors and soldiers wrapped all of these things in a sentimental language, looking beyond the sentimentalism to the core institutions of local political life is important, as Jefferson Davis well understood. Understanding these rituals of local politics and the institutions of local power are also important, if we are to understand the changes which took place when Mississippians entered army camps and became Confederate soldiers.

⁹ William B. Trotter to Pettus, Quitman MS, 12 April 1861, Folder 9, Box 931 (roll #2); John C. Higgins to Hon. J.J. Pettus, Meridian MS, 18 January 1861, Folder 3, Box 931 (roll #2), Pettus Correspondence, MDAH.

Life in a Confederate Army camp was a constant swirl of people, smells and noises, with long periods of boredom punctuated by moments of abject terror. In the main, the rhythm of a soldier's life was both chaotic and lonely, though many soldiers found solace in the drudgery of routine. "Well today is Sunday," wrote Isaac Alexander to his mother and sister from a camp near Corinth, "and what if it is Sunday is like any other day here, there is the same amount of work done to stay in Camp two days is quite a wonder it is either picket duty, guard at the trenches or Fatigue duty in other words there is always something to keep a man going."¹⁰

Embedded within their day-to-day experience was another aspect to the soldier's life which has gone under appreciated. In the midst of the long patrols, the fears of battle, the rotten meat, the hard tack and the cups of foul chicory, were a set of political experiences which amounted to something of a political culture. Civil War historians have analyzed the political attitudes of soldiers, particularly their belief in the righteousness of the cause for which both they and their friends were fighting and dying. However, attitudes alone do not make up the whole story. Accounts from the front, published for readers of southern newspapers who were anxious to learn all that they could of how their loved ones lived their lives as soldiers, often remarked on a camp life which also contained the constant talk of politics. "Camp life you doubtless imagine to be very dull," he wrote, "and you wouldn't be far wrong; but there are many ways of puttering in variations; cards, bacgammon, draft, and chess often serve the purpose of giving different parts to the opera. If you could see Bricks sitting cross-legged on a log, talkng politics and speculating upon the future, you would not think that the days of philosophy had passed away."¹¹

Idle talk of politics is, perhaps, not a surprising aspect of a soldier's life. As citizens of a state engaged in a struggle for survival, which grew to a nation in the first place after decades of

¹⁰ Isaac Alexander to Mother and Sister, near Corinth MS, 25 May 1862, Isaac Alexander Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter SHC-UNC).

¹¹ For two recent studies which have examined the attitudes of soldiers, see James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2007). *The American Citizen*, 18 January 1862.

political controversy and fiery sectional rhetoric, Confederate soldiers grew up in a culture where local and national politics was nothing short of a carnival in the fabric of American life. But politics and a nascent political culture gripped men in various military camps in ways that were entirely new. For instance, this political culture turned debates over whether they could define the terms of enlistment or elect, as they had done as members of local militia, the “best men” among them to be officers of companies and regiments, into potential points of fracture. This potentially raucous political culture is a difficult thing to apprehend. In many respects, it is as slippery a thing to define as definitions about what being a Confederate citizen meant. By 1862, however, both the political culture of the soldier and the terms of Confederate citizenship itself were in the midst of a transformation, as Confederate policies turned the obligations of soldiers away from the hodge-podge collection of local allegiances and local structures of authority the white South had developed in the antebellum period and toward an increasingly centralized national state. In Sunday sermons, in military manuals, within the very geography of Confederate camps themselves and during court martial proceedings, the Confederate state affected a social reorganization of southern life. Dividing the loyal soldier from the deserter, the devout citizen from the wayward one, the Confederate state tried to turn army camps into veritable schools of citizenship.¹²

Military manuals published throughout the war provided the blueprint for this social, political and cultural reorganization. Despite not having a particularly robust publishing culture, one of the most widely printed and most broadly distributed texts in the Confederacy were military manuals: compendiums of army regulations and reprints of the Articles of War, meant to act as textbooks to school would-be Confederates in the work of how to be a soldier. The manuals themselves were almost always in short supply, though the well-thumbed copies left to

¹² My interpretation of the ways in which states socially engineer rural societies, seeking centralized, simplified systems of organization to replace the informal practices and more “organic” structures, owes an obvious debt to James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

posterity attest to their wide circulation. They describe a life of order and hierarchy in the army so often belied by the world of movement and chaos that was the reality for most who served in the military. But amid the many camp regulations, the guardsmen's protocol and a list of bugle calls that marked the rhythm of a soldier's day-to-day life, military manuals provided soldiers with a vision of authority that placed the Confederate state front and center.

Manuals published in the spring of 1861 presented a vision of a military life that respected property, hierarchy, morality and manliness. In one manual of regulations adopted by the Confederate Congress, soldiers were required to "execute with alacrity and good faith, the lawful orders of the superiors appointed over them; Military authority is to be exercised with firmness, but with kindness and justice to inferiors. Punishments shall be strictly conformable to military law; Superiors of every grade are forbid to injure those under them by tyrannical or capricious conduct, or by abusive language." Commanders in the field were also directed to pay due attention to the discipline as well as the overall well-being of troops. They were to "encourage useful occupations and manly exercises, and diversions among their men, and to repress dissipation and immorality."¹³

Published manuals instructed soldiers on everything from how to fire a gun, set up a camp, what protocol to follow while on patrol duty and recipes for the cooking of camp food. One set of directions which were laid out in incredible detail was the actual "order of encampment." Readers were instructed that soldiers were to be encamped in the order of battle, with "main streets" organized throughout, creating ad-hoc thoroughfares for the purposes of order and smooth movement through camp. Twenty-two paces marked the distance separating regiments, with surgeons, a major and regimental adjutants camped to the right and quartermasters, a major and assistant surgeons camped to the left of a regimental body of troops. While the realities of war likely made these regulations little more than an ideal, they did give

¹³. *Army Regulations Adopted for the use of the Army of the Confederate States, In Accordance with the Late Act of Congress* (Atlanta: Gaulding & Whitaker "Intelligencer" Print, 1861), 3-4, 7, 14, 32-34, 62-66.

readers a vision of what camp life was like: a spatial geography meant to reinforce order and hierarchy necessary for the maintenance of military discipline.¹⁴

While the vast majority of Confederate soldiers had probably never read their Clausewitz, soldiers were encouraged to think of battle as a political act. In a circular written for officers, L.V. Buckholtz defined war as “only a tool of politics, without any mathematical foundation, a hazard of possibilities, probabilities, luck and ill-luck.” While this understanding of war, as a tool of negotiation between rival governments, perhaps turned the act of fighting it into an academic argument that in no way reflected a reader’s experience, the political meaning of war deeply influenced a soldier’s life. In the back of most military manuals, reprints of oaths taken by Confederate soldiers also laid out a different kind of service from the more locally oriented obligations with which most southerners would have been familiar. Lifted directly from the American Articles of War, the soldier’s oath of allegiance required men to serve the Confederate States of America “honestly and fa[i]thfully against all their enemies or opposers whatsoever; and observe and obey the order of the President of the Confederate States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the Rules and Articles for the government of the armies of the Confederate States.”¹⁵

Oaths of this sort, like most oaths taken by nineteenth century Americans, were not taken lightly. But at the outset of the conflict, what it meant for a soldier to swear allegiance to the Confederacy was still being worked out along with the nation-state itself, in the crucible of war. For all of the carefully written regulations of military manuals, the realities of camp life would determine what it meant to be a Confederate soldier and, increasingly, a Confederate citizen as well. And in this way, an evolving moral code and a emerging religious revivalism would form two pillars of camp life and military authority. In increasingly fiery sermons that cast the

¹⁴ John P. Curry, *Volunteers’ Camp and Field Book* (Richmond: West & Johnston, 1862), 75-77.

¹⁵ L.V. Buckholtz, *Tactics for Officers of Infantry, Cavalry and Artillery* (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1861), 7-8; *Army Regulations Adopted for the use of the Army of the Confederate States*, 175.

nation's fight for survival in biblical proportions, preachers turned notions of what it meant to be a "good Confederate citizen" into something both intimate and deeply spiritual.

A military manual published in 1861 called on all officers and soldiers to diligently attend religious services, with all those who "behave indecently or irreverently at any place of divine worship" were to be brought before a general court-martial and docked pay. With the weight of military punishment behind it, religion represented one of the most important institutions in the Confederate Army: sanctioned by a state that encouraged a hothouse revivalism in camps that swept religious communities throughout the South into a fervent support for the cause. The profusion of religious sentiment was not, however, an immediate phenomenon. Writing in mid 1861, Harry Lewis made sure to ease his mother's mind about her son's faithful observance to God. "I went to church Sunday," wrote Lewis, "or rather to the churches, for I went to two different ones and heard a part of two sermons and an exhortation. Camp is a bad place for religion it is true but Dear Mother it is not so bad as I expected."¹⁶

As his letter attests, by 1862 a devout young soldier like Harry Lewis had many, many options. Soldier's religious societies sprung up in camps throughout the army and growing exponentially in the years thereafter. Pastors and lay preachers in growing numbers joined regiments and Confederate soldiers, as part of a nation-wide effort to sustain the faith of men who were, in turn, sustaining the future of the nation-state. Hailing as they did from communities with strong Baptist or Methodist traditions, preachers found welcome groups, willing to have the Gospel administered to them on a weekly and sometimes daily basis. Many soldiers also became preachers and missionaries in their own right, "colportaging" their way through Confederate camps, distributing pamphlets and encouraging troops to attend services in a robust effort to convert the laity. One chaplain, stationed with a regiment in Virginia, offered a diary of his efforts to a religious newspaper in the spring of 1864. The diary included a veritable laundry list of prayers offered and lost souls saved. For eager readers, the chaplain offered details of one

¹⁶ Lewis to his Mother, "Camp Clark," 26 June 1861, Folder 1, Harry Lewis Papers, SHC-UNC.

conversion after another, of soldiers “burdened with sin and groping in darkness for the door to peace and joy,” who, with his help, found salvation.¹⁷

That colportaging soldiers had pamphlets to distribute was a direct result of a massive organizational effort among religious communities throughout the South, who took it upon themselves to convert Confederate soldiers and ensure that the faithful did not lose their way. At an 1864 meeting of the Union Baptist Association in Copiah County Mississippi, convention members made the religious observance of the troops the foremost goal of the church. “The object of furnishing the soldiers of our army the preached word. . . calls loudly on us at present for our most. . . energetic support,” they proclaimed:

While the brave heroes of our loved South are turning their breast to the storms of war, and are being swept off daily by disease and battle—while they are exposed to the temptations and demonic influences of camp life, it becomes us to throw around them the. . . gospel, and to furnish them every possible means of salvation.

The meeting resolved to invest all available church funds to found “Army Missions,” with the tools necessary to maintain the spiritual lives of the troops in the field, while other societies raised money to send bibles, tracts and even missionaries into army camps to preach, convert and sustain those faithful soldiers, many of whom had probably never been further from their place of worship. For their part, religious societies received countless testimonials from soldiers who wrote with glowing appreciation of their efforts. “The tracts were read and re-read by our brave men with eagerness,” wrote one colportaging lieutenant from North Carolina. “Many of them whom I had given only one, came back to know if they could not get more of these instructive

¹⁷ *The Book of Reference, for Regular and Volunteer Officers and Soldiers of the Confederate States Army, Containing the Articles of War* (New Orleans: William Bloomfield, 1861), sect. 1, art. 2. Increasingly, the study of religion in the Civil War has taken on a whole new importance for scholars. See, for example, Drew Gilpin Faust, “Christian Soldiers: The Meaning of Revivalism in the Confederate Army,” *Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 1 (1987): 63–90; Randall L. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Steven E. Woodworth, *While God Is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), though as Faust points out, interpretations of religious sentiment among Confederate soldiers remains largely under-theorized. For a study of colportage and religious conversion in Confederate camps, see Gorrell Clinton Prim Jr., “Born Again in the Trenches: Revivalism in the Confederate Army” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1982), 25–31, 45–64. For a chaplain’s published diary, see *The Confederate Baptist*, 27 April 1864.

messages. I am anxious to have *all* the men of our regiments supplied with the teachings of Jesus.”¹⁸

This intimate connection between church and state was built not only on the strength of missionaries and regimental preachers, but upon a vibrant culture of soldier’s newspapers that circulated throughout the Confederate Army.¹⁹ And while secular newspapers were merely read for any war news, religious newspapers were read with ardor. “Its every page is scanned,” wrote one soldier in a letter to the editor of the *Confederate Baptist*, “and passes from hand to hand and for days after its arrival it is read and its wholesome truths pondered.” Between the pages of the *Baptist*, soldiers were kept abreast of religious meetings, prayer groups and updates on the work of missionaries in other corners of the Confederate Army.²⁰ Newspapers also encouraged soldiers to pay due attention to the temptations that threatened the moral life of the soldier, as well as the challenges of fighting a war for the future of the Confederacy. For religious newspaper editors, “[t]he camp is a place of trial, but it is no less a school of virtue; and the soldier may entitle himself to the admiration of his country, not only by the toils and perils of the

¹⁸ *Minutes of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Union Baptist Association, Pine Bluff Church, Copiah Co. MS, 23-25 September 1864* (Monticello MS: Southern Journal Book & Job Office, 1864); *Minutes of the Eleventh Session of the Judson Baptist Association, Center Hill Church, Itawamba Co. MS, 3-6 September 1863* (Verona MS: Verona Times Job Office, 1863). Quote from *The General Tract Society Circular* (Raleigh NC: General Tract Society, 1862). On the reaction of troops to associational efforts, and on religion in military camps more generally, see Reid Mitchell, “Christian Soldiers?: Perfecting the Confederacy,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall L. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 297–309.

¹⁹ In his earlier study of Confederate soldiers and in an essay he wrote in 1977, Bell Wiley alerted historians to a scattered but fascinating collection of soldier newspapers which he had found in his research. While scholars have largely ignored these difficult but revealing sources, the most recent work by Chandra Manning offers some important insights about the quotidian life of camp and the goings on of armies, written by the men experiencing them. While Manning and Wiley have not mined these sources for their political implications, I use the few that relate to soldiers in the Confederate Army as a way to understand soldier’s newspapers as political texts, which reflect something of the political culture of the soldiers themselves. See Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier in the Confederacy*, reprint, 1943 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 161; Bell Irvin Wiley, “Soldier Newspapers of the Civil War,” *Civil War Times Illustrated* 16, no. 4 (1977): 20–29 and Chandra Miller Manning, “What This Cruel War Was Over: Why Union and Confederate Soldiers Thought They Were Fighting the Civil War” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002). For the importance of the religious press in Confederate camps, see Kurt O. Berends, “‘Wholesome Reading Purifies and Elevates the Man’: The Religious Military Press in the Confederacy,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall L. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 131–66.

²⁰ *The Confederate Baptist*, 10 December 1862, 15 April 1863.

campaign, but by the high qualities which those toils and perils have developed and nurtured.” The tenuous nature of the times had, according to many editors, brought about a sea change in the relationship between the many southern religious denominations, which had not been without friction. Circumstance called upon all upstanding, God-fearing Confederates to do away with “sectarian discussions, and taking their stand upon the common principles of the Gospel, present a united front.” As late as April 1865, religious newspapers were calling on the support of citizens at home, to furnish soldiers with the means to be saved, in the hope that they might save the state in the process. “The word preached comes with power to the hearts of many, and the inquiry is, ‘What must we do to be saved?’” asked an editorial in the *Army and Navy Herald*. “These are blessed scenes in the midst of strife and bloodshed. And most devoutly should we thank God that he is moving in mercy in the midst of the men of war. . . Nothing that can contribute to the comfort of our soldiers should be withheld. . . They are calling for God’s Word, for good books and papers. They must have them, and so long as the people have the means of procuring them they shall have them.”²¹

It was in the connections that newspapers and chaplains made between religion and the fate of the Confederate nation, however, that the political implications of religious observance in the army comes into sharper focus. By the war’s middle stages, missionary efforts to sustain the faithful and convert wayward soldiers had created a potent civil religion, with symbols of power and rituals of obedience on which the Confederate state could draw. The connections between the rhetoric of the preacher at the pulpit and the obedience commanded by military leaders in the field was never so direct as to compel a direct response from the soldiers themselves. But what the revivalism did do was offer a potent symbolism on top of which preachers offered the faithful fire and brimstone reminders of what could befall a soldier if he strayed from the path of dutiful righteousness. Speaking to a regiment of South Carolinians, a chaplain’s sermon was printed in 1863 called on soldiers to see their friends who had fallen as having died “the glorious

²¹ *The Confederate Baptist*, 17 December 1862, 20 May 1863; *The Army and Navy Herald*, 16 March 1865.

death of martyrs” in the service of “our new and heaven-born Republic.” “Our cause is just,” the chaplain went on, “our army vast in numbers, fully equipped, with all the munitions of modern warfare, has proven itself to be mighty in battle, gallant and invincible in spirit, and, above all, the Omnipotent Jehovah is with us, and therefore we must conquer.” Sermons like these offered something more than just rhetoric. Religious fervor fused with the fortunes of the Confederate state, creating a deeply resonant allegory that justified the actions of that state, which had, by the end of the war, come to represent some of the most powerful symbols in southern culture. By the end of the war, the Confederate state was the protector of white families and attempts to connect the state to these symbols through religion had political implications, that went far beyond the tender ties of home. Testimonials of faith became testimonials of loyalty and devotion to the Confederacy, socializing rural southerners in the proper habits of the loyal and God-fearing Confederate soldier.²²

If religion made up one pillar of the Confederate soldier’s political culture—offering a vision of a benevolent state for which God-fearing men should devote their lives—the other was a growing set of controls at the state’s disposal. These controls offered constant reminders of the harsh treatment that could befall the disloyal. Turning soldiers into model citizens was the hoped-for result of Confederate policy, but the positive association between soldiers and the Confederacy required harsh discipline to give the nation’s “schools of citizenship” their power. Beginning with conscription and intensifying over battles waged over the rights of troops to act independent of state authority, the Confederacy tightened its grip over its military, sharpening the contrast between loyalty and subversion.

By the beginning of 1862, letters arriving in the offices of the War Department in Richmond, testified to the difficulties facing an army built around local prerogatives of communities not the centralized authority of a state. One letter, written by an eager Mississippian, offered a regiment of troops for the war on the condition that the men be able to

²² *The Confederate Baptist*, 7 January 1863.

“capture goods, chattels or any property being actually used for the good of the enemy,” as well as “the right to transfer to any post where our services may be regarded.” Other letters posed an even more direct challenge. An artillery regiment from Georgia, writing to fellow Georgian Vice President Alexander Stephens, argued that while as volunteers they had gladly reenlisted in the service of the Confederacy, devotion to the nation did not mean the abrogation of their customary rights as soldiers. Protesting the decision of General Braxton Bragg, who refused to verify the election of the regiment’s officers and had installed a Louisianian at the head of the regiment instead, petitioners demanded to know if they were to “submit to a perfect stranger. . . Shall Georgians be deprived of their rights & privileges in such a manner?” By 1862, conditional service and officer elections had become symptomatic of a deeper problem, one that conscription attempted to solve.²³

From the moment white southerners from all over the American South began to organize as Confederate soldiers, the issue of officer elections and the terms of military service became something of a flash point: a point of conflict that laid bare some the problems of sovereignty and obligation at the heart of the Confederate state building project. What started as the logistical problem of raising an army quickly and with the minimum expense, became a growing problem for the Confederate state by the time Congress convened in the middle of February 1862. In his message to that body, President Jefferson Davis left no doubt as to the importance of the national state addressing this imbalance of power. Since his first message to Congress the previous year, Davis wrote, “events have demonstrated that the Government had attempted more than it had power successfully to achieve.” Though Davis believed that many of those defeats on the battlefield and problems within the structure of governance had been remedied in the short term, he believed that the policy of limiting the enlistment of troops for only twelve months had “contributed in no immaterial degree to the recent reverses which we have suffered, and even

²³. James B. Perkins to the Hon. Judah P. Benjamin, Columbus KY, 2 January 1862, Roll 21; Members of the Washington Artillery to Alexander P. Stephens, near Corinth MS, 25 April 1862, Roll 71, Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, NA.

now renders it difficult to furnish you an accurate statement of the Army.” The President ended his message on a note which was both cautionary and hopeful, but a solution to the problem of a state not in complete control of its own military could wait no longer.²⁴

The action required to remedy this issue would, however, require a particular brand of political will among those in the Congress: a will to enlarge the prerogative of the state at the expense of the foundations of local authority which undergirded southern society and, in many cases, guaranteed many representatives their political fortunes. To provide the necessary cover to legislators, the Senate changed a procedural rule which made all deliberations affecting the foreign relations or the public defense of the Confederacy taken up in a secret session. While the rule change did not pass without opposition, by early April legislators had drafted a bill “to raise an Army for the Confederate States of America.” The bill’s title is revealing. It indicated a conviction on the part of the Congress that was shared by those in all branches of the national government, that the Confederacy required a modern army to prosecute a thoroughly modern war that could carry on for an indefinite period of time. Of paramount importance to the writers of the legislation were clauses relating to the rights of officer election and appointment and by the time the bill was passed by a two-to-one vote, the right of election had been curtailed significantly. The legislation stipulated that for those already serving in the military, soldiers were called upon to re-enlist for a period of two years. If they agreed to do so, they could remain in their current regiments, be permitted a furlough to return home to their families and could continue to elect their officers as necessary. Should the war take a turn for the better, they would also be among the first to be relieved from duty.²⁵

But in legislation passed days later, the Confederate Congress made it clear to those who might choose to not enlist, what their options really entailed. The “Act to Further Provide for the Public Defense,” passed on 18 April 1862, was a powerful conscription act: a sweeping piece of

²⁴. *Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America*, 7 vols, Sen. Doc. No. 234, 2nd Sess. 58th Congress (1904-05), vol. 2: 22.

²⁵. *Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America*, 2: 123, 128, 137, 140-42, 146, 153-54.

legislation that made white men between the ages of 18 and 35 subject to compulsory military service and the direct authority of the Confederate state. In addition, the legislation allowed the national government to sweep away many of the competing structures of power which had checked its growth and set the national state on a foundation of indisputable authority over the human resources within its borders. The act put the officers of local and state government in the employ of the Confederacy, as conscription enrollment officers: individuals appointed directly by the Secretary of War. If those called to serve refused to answer, the legislation extended the remit of military law to arrest and try citizens as deserters. Conscripts would join existing regiments and would be assigned at the discretion of the War Department, though the legislation stipulated that they would be placed in fighting units organized from their home state. Finally, while the legislation left it in the hands of regiments to appoint their own officers, the executive branch reserved the right to appoint (with congressional consent) all officers in conscript regiments in the event of “vacancies,” coming either as a result of promotion or death. While historians rightly point to the long list of exemptions and the reaction of Confederates to them, the other aspects of the legislation are equally important and revealing. They amount to a state acting to enlarge its authority over the populace within its borders.²⁶

The effect of the Conscript Act sent shockwaves throughout the Confederacy. Three months after the act passed, letters from all over the Confederacy brought about a flurry of enlistment among those men still at home, with volunteer regiments formed quickly and offered up for service in the national army, in an effort to avoid being conscripted. The lengthy list of exemptions from service also brought forth a flood of letters and petitions from soldiers,

²⁶ *The Statutes at Large of the Confederate States of America, Commencing with the First Session of the First Congress; 1862. Public Laws of the Confederate States of America, Passed at the First Session of the First Congress; 1862. Private Laws of the Confederate States of America, Passed at the First Session of the First Congress; 1862* (Richmond: R.M. Smith, 1862), 29-32. For more on exemptions, see Albert Burton Moore, *Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 12-113; Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 54-93; Thomas, *Confederate Nation*, 145-66 and William Alan Blair, *Virginia's Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 81-107.

potential soldiers, their families and their communities. These letters often amounted to political campaigns in their own right: long lists of signatories, attesting to the important work a particular blacksmith, doctor or overseer tendered to his community. The language of these appeals tells an interesting story in and of themselves. Increasingly, whites all over the nation prevailed upon persons unknown and unfamiliar in the Confederate state, begging them to make some exception for a loved one or a dutiful citizen. Often, exemption appeals leaned heavily on the rhetoric of unprotected families and the dark prospect of black rebellion, should the countryside be emptied of white men to protect wives and daughters from harm. “Removing every physician for an area of Twenty four miles distant, from a portion subject to all the diseases of a southern clime,” wrote Mississippi petitioners from Carroll County, was not nearly as threatening as the removal of white male protection from a black insurgency that most Mississippians believed was just around the corner. “With a large population of Slaves, making bread for our Army together with a due proportion of women & children. Our County has done its duty nobly, responding to every call & has now out of eighteen hundred voters twenty companies fully organized & in the field for the War.”²⁷

Amid the petitions, however, was something more about how white southerners understood the power of the Confederate state and their relationship to it: a change in the way petitioners and letter writers felt they now needed to justify themselves to officials they had never met, to prove their allegiance. This change can also be detected within the state itself. The sweeping powers within the act of conscription proved a powerful demonstration of a national government flexing its muscles and regardless of whether it was an authority bestowed upon the state out of necessity, officials began to think about the state and its reach in new ways. The

²⁷ On volunteer enlistment to avoid conscription, see Capt. Jason C. McRae to Gen. George Randolph, Statesville NC, 11 July 1862, Roll 61, Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, NA. Petitioners from Carroll County to the Sec. of War, Carroll Co. MS, 1 May 1862, Roll 33, Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, NA. The number of petitions sent to the Confederate Secretary of War numbers in the thousands, with the bulk written in 1862. For a fuller examination of the meaning behind these petitions and the political valences that developed out of them, see Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Crucible: The Political Transformation of the Civil War South* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

Conscript Act represented the most controversial piece of legislation passed by the Confederate state in its short life: a bold grasp for power to fight a new kind of war, with the tools of a different kind of state from the one the vast majority of white southerners were familiar with. For their part, soldiers already within the service had come to expect that this sort of change was on the horizon. Writing from Savannah Georgia in February 1862, Mississippi soldier George Furniaful warned his sister, “tell the Boys to look out for the draft or they will be caught they is so much fuss hear. . .I can think of nothing much to write. . .our officers appears very much above us these days a grate deal more so than I think there is very necessary for.” Editorials written early that winter also suggested the beginnings of a division among white southerners that would quickly make up a fundamental political division within the Confederate Army. While the writer of one editorial acknowledged, by way of refutation, a growing disaffection among whites toward the national government, a growing hostility towards exemptions within the Conscript Act that turned the conflict into a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight only grew in intensity in the months that followed the bill becoming law, dividing loyal volunteers from seemingly less loyal Confederate conscripts:

The information which we receive from the army, and the sentiments which we hear on every hand refute the intimation [that Confederate citizens have turned against the war]. Resentment against the loafers who hang about the barrooms, and against the few ‘nice young men’ who are skulking a noble duty, and dancing attendance on the ladies, while the ladies despise them, is indeed felt to some effect. Our present soldiers would like to see these driven to duty. But they do not wish to be driven themselves. They intend to have the glory of being volunteers for their country’s defense, and not drafted men, tak[en] by the collar and pulled to their posts.

The Conscript Act marked the start of a fundamental reorganization of Confederate political culture, redrawing the lines of allegiance connecting individuals to time-worn webs of local obligation. The act signaled the growth of a powerful state in the lives of citizens and no where was this more apparent than in Confederate army camps. New traditions of fealty, new rituals of devotion, new measures of allegiance were constructed within these army camps, in ways that divided white southern men from one another as much as it knit them together as Confederate

citizens.²⁸

But just as the Conscript Act renegotiated the fundamental relationship between soldiers and the state, new measures of control and an increased willingness on the part of the Confederate state to use these measures to stem the tide of desertions from the army, had an impact on how soldiers understood their place in relation to the national government. While the religious fervor throughout the Confederate Army crafted a powerful iconography of the state and the nation, the corollary of that fervor was a growing fear of the state and its power. Historians who have studied desertion in the Confederacy have focused attention on the number of soldiers who left their regiments without leave by the hundreds and thousands by the end of the Civil War. The sheer weight of numbers has led to an interpretation of desertion as an index of a waning Confederate nationalism. What scholars have not focused as much attention on, however, were the efforts of the Confederate state to stem the flood of men from their ranks, or the attitudes of those who chose to remain as loyal soldiers. The result had a deep impact on the political world of the soldier and amounted to a renegotiation of allegiance. Soldiers who were witness to courts-martial or public executions of deserters understood the cost of disloyalty, as the cost many paid for their failure to live up to the ideal of the Confederate citizen-soldier.²⁹

²⁸ Furniaful to Sister, Savannah GA, 27 February 1862, George Furniaful Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University (hereafter DU); Natchez *Daily Courier* (from the Richmond *Examiner*), 31 January 1862.

²⁹ The literature on desertion in the Confederacy includes some of the most venerable works in the field of southern history: older works by scholars in the 1930s and 40s who, influenced by Beardian interpretations of class conflict in American history and the publication of the *War of the Rebellion* series, wrote important first works using government documents which continue to influence successive generations of historians. See, for example, Moore, *Conscription and Conflict*; Ella Lonn, *Desertion During the Civil War* (New York and London: The Century Co., 1928) and Georgia Lee Tatum, *Disloyalty in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934). While few scholars have written a fuller, more up-to-date treatment of the subject, desertion in the Confederacy remains a primary point of study and debate among scholars of Confederate history. See, for example, Wiley, *Life of Johnny Reb*, 123–50, 217–43; Phillip Shaw Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981); Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17–59; Victoria E. Bynum, *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 93–113 and Mark A. Weitz, *More Damning Than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

The power of the state was brought home to men like Capt. W.M. Butt in the late summer of 1862, when he witnessed the execution of a soldier he never knew. “Andy I have juste saw one of the Worst sight that I Ever saw in my life,” wrote Butt to Andrew White, “I have juste saw a man shot fore disertion. He bee long to the fifth Virginia regment. . .it was. . .a nuff to see our Men shot bye the yankees but it is Worse to see them shote by our one men. It is more than I Ever Expected to see in My life bee fore.” As early as June 1862, scattered missives from around the Confederate Army reported cases of desertion, often coordinated with entire groups of men from the same community or county leaving the service en masse. Many deserters continued to remain in groups if they managed to escape camp, with the hope perhaps that their strength in numbers would protect them from the reach of military authority.³⁰

For their part, Confederate authorities were initially sensitive not only to the problem of desertion, but the implications of dealing with deserters too harshly. They knew full well that an overreaction on the part of the military might result in the spread of disaffection that was already growing in camps throughout the army. One report from the Confederacy’s Adjutant and Inspector General Samuel Cooper, which laid out the policy of state action against deserters in the U.S. Army, argued that the traditional use of the lash to punish desertion, set a bad precedent in a nation of slaveholders. “[I]n an army of volunteers, composed of Southern soldiers, and in a country where punishment by stripes is perhaps seldom, if ever inflicted on white citizens by the judgement of the civil tribunals,” wrote Cooper, “such a punishment is naturally regarded as degrading, and had better be suspended at least during the existence of our present military organization.” Military commanders hoped that Cooper’s published report, along with talk in the Confederate Congress of repealing the conscription exemptions which had angered so many

³⁰ Capt. W.M. Butt to White, camp near Rappadan VA, 20 August 1862, Folder 1, Andrew White Papers, DU; Col. E.F. Kerr to Capt. William A. Smith, Camp Downs [?], 9 June 1862, Roll 77; Chelsey Martin and George H. Hall to Hon. George W. Randolph, Richmond VA, 4 June 1862, Roll 61, Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, NA; Duncan McKenzie to Duncan McLaurin, Taylorville, Smith Co. MS, 28 January 1863, Duncan McLaurin Papers, DU, in *RASP*, ser. F, part 1, reel 6; Col. B.J. Hill to Col. E.J. Harris (Inspect. Gen.), Headquarters, Army of the Tennessee, 25 March 1864, Folder 5, Box 394, Ser. 608: Correspondence of Various Mississippi Officers and Military Staff Members, 1861-1865, Misc. Civil War Documents, MDAH.

soldiers in the army, would stop the steady flow of desertions. But the logic of state power contained within the Conscript Act negated the hope of many that conscription would be repealed altogether. Despite the difficulties of sustaining the legislation in practice, the relatively small proportion of men who counted themselves as conscripts within the Confederate Army itself, and letters that spoke of conscription as a poison that was dissolving the bonds of white southern society, the Confederate state could not do away with conscription. It was the state's central claim to authority.³¹

The importance of conscription as a tool of state power and the necessity of the state punishing those who would flee the ranks, becomes clearer when one examines the many punishments the Confederate military *did* resort to, to make an example of deserters. Public and ritualized, soldiers who plotted or carried out plans to desert became symbols in their own right, in camps throughout the Confederate Army, as icons of the Confederate state itself. The sentences deserters received represented the most simple and powerful manifestation of the state, as scars on formerly manacled wrists or lash marks from whippings marked the deserter almost as much as the branded "D" administered to the wrists and hips of many others. Soldiers witness to the process, or those unlucky enough to be on trial, could not help but feel the increased will of the national government in these proceedings and the public nature of punishments in army camps made the display of the state's will over its troops of a primary importance.

Particularly by 1863, the ground had shifted as the moral economy of troops came into direct conflict with the dispensation of military justice. Conscription and the Confederate state's

³¹ *Report of the Adjutant and Inspector General*, Richmond VA, 31 January 1863; Joseph J. Bradford to his Excellency, Jefferson Davis, Camilla GA, 18 February 1863, Roll 81, Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, NA. The scattered evidence used in interpreting the relative strengths and weaknesses of the policy indicates that taken together, conscription did more to weaken the Confederate Army than bolster it. The best estimates indicate that the Confederate government exempted 44.9% of all the men called out by the Conscription Act. In addition, while James McPherson argues that conscription bolstered the army's total numbers by the end of 1862, by roughly 100,000, the growing number of soldiers required to keep men in the army sapped the Confederacy of troops in more remote regions of the nation. See Moore, *Conscription and Conflict*, 109 and McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 429–32. The growing reach of the state through conscription, can best be seen in the War Department's formation of a "conscript police," to track down deserters throughout the nation. See Circular from the Adjutant and Inspector General's Office, Richmond VA, 8 January 1863.

desire to tighten its grip over the national army resulted in an ethos that trickled downward through the chain of command. The success of conscription policies depended upon a clear and unalloyed will on the part of the state to ensure that those who either volunteered or were conscripted to serve as soldiers remained in the service. Softer punishments became a thing of the past, as Confederate military authorities sought to erase the any sense in which a soldier who deserted would not be punished to the fullest extent of the law. Cases involving troops from the shifting border regions of the Confederacy who deserted, for instance, resulted in harsh punishments that often ended up with convicted soldiers in front of firing squads.³² Punishments also started to become more public and much more geared towards the shaming of an individual, as a means of making an example of him for the purposes of deterring others who might follow in a convicted soldier's footsteps. Soldiers "marked time" on the head of a barrel for specific hours in a day, in "conspicuous places in regimental camp." Others were sentenced to be whipped, in spite, or perhaps because of the symbolic power of a white man being seen under the lash. Some were sentenced to have their head shaved and to be drummed out of the service by their own company. Others were sentenced to wear placards around their neck, with the words "deserter" written on them. Still others were subject to branding. One man was forced to have the letters "D" and "T" branded on each hip, to mark the individual as both a deserter and a traitor to his nation.³³

³² While historians have made much of the regional variation of Confederate desertion, it would be worthwhile to think more about whether Confederate policies to punish deserters varied from one court-martial to the next, depending upon the geographical location of the accused. For evidence of increasingly harsh punishments in cases of desertion involving soldiers from border regions of the Confederacy, see Proceedings of a General Court Martial of Andrew Robinson, Camp of the 4th Brig., 8th Div. [VA], 23 July 1862, Roll 69, Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, NA. Bell Wiley argues that Confederate courts-martial were, on the whole, lax to the point of being overly lenient throughout the Civil War. He predicates his argument, however, on the idea that lax enforcement of military law was required, to keep the ingrained democratic ideals of the white South in check. I argue here that while this argument holds water for the period between the outbreak of the war to the introduction of conscription, it does not hold for later courts-martial, in which the application of military discipline was more severe, in the face of a growing case load involving cases of desertion. See Wiley, *Life of Johnny Reb*, 217–43, esp. 219–20.

³³ Sentence of Lieut. P.C. Harper, 25 LA Vols, 18 February 1863, Chp. 1, Vol. 195, Records of Courts-Martial, 1861-1865, Records of the Adjutant & Inspector General's Department, RG 109: War Department Collection of Confederate Records, 1861-1865, NA. For soldiers marking time on a barrel, see the sentence of Pvt. James Carton,

The rather brutal punishments doled out by Confederate courts-martial would not be particularly new to military historians. They are commonplace in the history of most armed conflicts, though the creativity and seemingly random punishments doled out by military courts suggest that by the middle of the war, punishing deserters was a means of dividing the loyal from the disloyal within the Confederate Army. The variation of punishments from army to army also suggests that much of what may have influenced soldiers depended upon the army in which they fought. The public shaming and creativity of court-martial punishments in Confederate camps marked the public spaces that soldiers inhabited, taking on the character of a kind of “rough music.” Ritualized punishments of individuals exacted by one’s own, in ways that appeared to be sanctioned by the mass of Confederate soldiers, served at once to punish the disloyal and bolster the identification of those who remained in the military, with the state who punished those attempting to flee.³⁴

Whether they were interpreted in this way or not, it escaped the notice of few that by 1862, military justice had taken on a whole new meaning. One newspaper correspondent noted both the increased regularity and the growing severity of court-martial punishments, suggesting that a recent spate of judgments “were more than usually severe”:

A number of men are to be shot, a few whipped, a large number to labor with ball and chain, and some to be decorated with a flour barrel shirt. Have you ever witnessed the latter punishment? It is a severe one. The barrel is placed over the head of the defender, his arms being put through holes on each side. The barrel is marked in large letters, ‘Absent without leave,’ ‘I deserted my colors,’ and other sentences to describe the nature of the offense. The culprit, feeling like a drowned rat, is then led up and down the line or stationed in front of his regiment during dress parade. . . I am afraid, however, that as a general thing court martials are too severe. I saw a man on a late terrible march of sixty miles wearing all the way a ball and chain, weighing about twenty-five pounds. His offense was a simple one, and knowing the man to be ordinarily a good soldier, my heart bled for him.³⁵

SC Vols, 19 October 1862; for head shaving see the sentence of Corp. James Collier [?], 27th VA Vols., 15 June 1862; for branding, see the Sentence of Pvt. Jonathan Becker, 38th AL, 17 January 1862, all in the Records of Courts-Martial, Chp. 1, Vol. 195, RG 109, NA.

³⁴ The idea of popular rituals of “rough music” is taken from the work of E.P. Thompson, in his *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1991), 467–538.

³⁵ *The Daily Mississippian* (from the *Atlanta Confederacy*), 11 April 1863.

Not all southerners were as sympathetic. Some were much more sanguine about punishing lawlessness in Confederate territory that many attributed to the actions of deserters. One Confederate from Mississippi wrote that while the majority of men were more determined than ever to fight, others were deserting daily, to the shame of all connected to them. "I do wish they would took them up & shoot them down like dogs," wrote J.R. Baird, "for they deserve nothing better & unless we do manage to put a stop to it & also bring out those who have substitutes & able bodied commissaries & Quartermasters, we are a ruined nation without doubt."³⁶

Regardless of whether depictions of military punishments amounted to a popular outcry at the treatment of soldiers, records indicate that by the spring of 1863, a combination of more rigidly applied military justice and a growing number of desertion cases resulted in an unprecedented number of courts-martial convened. In March of that year alone, the offices of the Adjutant and Inspector General processed six hundred and thirty court-martial cases, many of those resulting in harsh punishments for convicted soldiers. Attempts to codify punishments for the purposes of more orderly and timely judgment, in the face of a growing case load, also testified to a shift in state power. One publication, intended as a military manual for judge advocates in general courts-martial, listed the punishment for desertion, sedition, mutiny and even planned desertion, as subject to either death by firing squad or the discretion of the court.³⁷

The reactions of military authorities to the problem of desertion did not stop the flood of men escaping the army. Best estimates indicate that between October 1864 and February 1865 alone, nearly 72,000 men took their leave from the Confederate Army east of the Mississippi River. By the end of the war, roughly 100,000 men were listed as AWOL in the muster rolls of all Confederate regiments. Historians who have examined these numbers have rightly pointed to them as a key to the Confederacy's collapse: that desertions hobbled the army's ability to

³⁶ J.R. Baird to J.M. Baird, Camp Hindman, near Chattanooga TN, 28 August 1863, Folder 14, Box 1, Baird Collection, DSU.

³⁷ This tally of courts-martial cases is drawn from the ledgers of Records of Courts-Martial, Chp. 1, Vol. 195, RG 109, NA. For manual for Judge-Advocates, see Capt. R.C. Gilchrist, *The Duties of a Judge Advocate in a Trail before a General Court-Martial* (Columbia SC: Evans and Cogswell, 1864), 42-46.

prosecute the war. It is not by accident, they argue, that cases of desertion spiked at the point in the war when the momentum of battle shifted from the Confederate to Union forces. With the fall of Vicksburg and the loss at the Battle of Gettysburg, desertion was but one of several interlocking factors that ground the Confederate Army to a halt.³⁸

But while there can be no argument that desertions sapped the Confederate Army of the means to fend off Union advances into their territory, the growth of the Confederate state to both conscript soldiers into the army and combat desertion represented a bold centralization of authority that had lasting consequences. These consequences filtered throughout the Confederacy, leaving no doubt as to the prominence of a new locus of power in the lives of white southerners. Editorials in southern newspapers talked of growing state power and the twisting of the national government towards something akin to a dictatorship: “It is difficult to believe that many members of the Congress really intend the establishment of a dictatorship in this country, still less to make Mr. Davis dictator. Yet it requires but little reflection to perceive that such a law lately suggested in his message. . . is nothing more nor less than that.”³⁹ In sermons published and distributed throughout the army, preachers hammered home the notion of desertion as tantamount to sinful behavior that should rightly be punished. Rev. John Paris, preaching before a regiment of North Carolinians at the execution of no less than twenty-two members of the brigade, who had been killed as punishment for their desertion, called on those still loyal to appreciate the connections between their righteous sacrifice to the nation-state and the righteousness of executing deserters. Claiming those soldiers who fled to be little more than modern-day Judas Iscariots and Benedict Arnolds, Paris argued that deserters did more than just turn their back on their nation. They also turned their back on the solemn oath which all Confederate soldiers took to faithfully serve the state and ensure its future no matter the cost. “With all the responsibilities of this solemn oath upon their souls,” decried Paris:

³⁸ Lonn, *Desertion During the Civil War*, 21–37.

³⁹ Natchez *Daily Courier* (from the Richmond *Examiner*), 1 January 1864.

and all the ties that bind men to the land that gave them birth, ignoring every principle that pertains to the patriot, disowning that natural as well as lawful allegiance that every man owes to the government of the State which throws around him the ægis of its protection, they went, boldly, Judas and Arnold-like, made an agreement with the enemies of their country, took an oath of fidelity and allegiance to them, and agreed with them for money to take up arms and assist in the unholy and hellish work of the subjugation of the country which was their own, their native land! These men have only met the punishment meted out by all civilized nations for such crimes. To this, all good men, all true men, and all loyal men who love their country, will say, Amen!⁴⁰

Paris' religious vitriol was eagerly taken up in camp newspapers, where editorials turned loyalty to the Confederacy back on itself, suggesting that even in defeat, loyal Confederates should never relinquish the devoted feelings of allegiance which connected them to their beleaguered state. In another sermon printed in March 1865, the Rev. L. Pierce addressed the officers and privates of an army which, he argued, represented the highest ideal of patriotic valor, for a nation in freefall. But in his effort to sustain morale, Pierce took his argument a step further, imagining not only a future when the Confederate state was secure, but a future Confederate body politic as well. Speaking of the soldiers who made up his audience, Pierce argued that the political power of those loyal soldiers still in the army, would exert "an influence at the ballot box [that] will be controlling. . . Now, therefore, when the war is over, and independence established, I advise that you openly and avowedly declare your determination to make moral integrity and Christian virtue indispensable qualities in every man that is to be preferred to any office needed in your country. If you will do this, you will find supporters enough of this measure to give you the power in the Confederacy you will so richly deserve; fail to do it, and you will only help to build up another political Sodom, which in due time will become the Dead Sea of an unsanctified Republicanism."⁴¹

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⁴⁰ Rev. John Paris, *A Sermon: Preached before Brig.-Gen. Hoke's Brigade, at Kinston, N. C., on the 28th of February, 1864, by Rev. John Paris, Chaplain Fifty-Fourth Regiment N. C. Troops, upon the Death of Twenty-Two Men, Who Had Been Executed in the Presence of the Brigade for the Crime of Desertion* (Greensborough NC: A. W. Ingold & Co., Book and Job Printers, 1864), in the Documenting the American South Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/paris/paris.html> (accessed 14 November 2008).

⁴¹ *The Army and Navy Herald*, 9 February 1865, 23 March 1865.

It would be easy to interpret these musings of a sanctified nationalism as delusional. Standing at the precipice of an impending disaster by 1864, some loyal Confederates could only imagine their nation into being, when in many parts of the American South, the Confederacy existed in name alone. Yet, in as much as the end of the war brought with it a growing culture of hazy memorializations and rose-colored memories of a once proud nation laid low, defeat and the collapse of the Confederacy had more immediate political consequences. The early recognition of this fact is evident in letters that Union officials exchanged, from occupied areas of the South before the war officially ended. Writing in February 1865, S.H. Melcher expressed just some of the scenes he witnessed, as he travelled through occupied Mississippi. “Most of the Mississippians . . . (in this section I mean). . . have not yet given up,” wrote Melcher. “[T]hey with very few exceptions wear their grey uniforms, on all occasions, and seem to glory in it at their school Exhibitions & Tableaux. the pieces most applauded are those deriding ‘Yankees’ or a battle in which rebs kill off any amount of soldiers in blue. these things only show the feeling of the people. they hate any man who is not in favor of the rebel cause and in favor of vagrant & apprentice laws, which will reduce the freedmen to worse slavery than before.” While Melcher believed that Confederate loyalty would not extinguish easily, even in the face of defeat, homefront support for the cause was matched by an even more fundamental allegiance between soldiers and the state, when viewed from within the remnants of the Confederate Army. “Some of our Southern people are much disheartened,” wrote a soldier to his cousin in March 1865, “but the army is in good spirits and confident of our ultimate success. . . I have now been in the army nearly 4 years and am fully immune to all of its tails and hardships in fact I feel that I am fit for nothing else but a soldier.”⁴²

⁴² S.H. Melcher to Col. Samuel Thomas, La Grange TN, 6 February 1865, Roll 15 (Letters Received), Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Mississippi (M826), RG 105: Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, NA; Cousin to Eliza Caldwell, Duck Hill MS, 15 March 1865, Eliza F. Caldwell Papers, DU. This point about the deeply rooted nature of Confederate nationalism, has been more recently examined by Jason Phillips, in his *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

The words of a soldier and the instructions from a preacher like Pierce alert us to an important aspect of the Confederate experience. The time spent in army camps taught soldiers something more than how to be disciplined cogs in a modern army. It also socialized soldiers like Eliza Caldwell's cousin in how to be Confederate citizens. The complications that arose from this rough education—when the nation soldiers were taught to respect dissolved into complete anarchy—took many forms. But perhaps the most fundamental change that resulted from the white southerner's experience in the military was that after four and a half years of struggle which ultimately ended in defeat, the bonds that connected Confederate citizen-soldiers to a failed state did not dissolve when the state surrendered and ceased to exist. After expanding its size and intensifying its reach, the Confederate state fundamentally altered the structure of allegiance and authority that white southerners brought with them into the army. Older connections among and between white communities had been both local in scope and complicated by the interconnections between rural families and kin groups.

But the war and the Confederate military experience altered these structures and re-routed these interconnections, creating a web of authority with the state at its center. Coercive measures, wrapped in a warm language of family, home and religious devotion, the political culture of the Confederate soldier morphed into a kind of national family tree, with a benevolent, even-handed state as both the root and branch of a new body politic. Conscription and efforts to stop the flow of desertions made up two parts of a larger, deeper revolution in the attitudes of southerners: a revolution in how a rural people understood both power and the reach of a state. Whether they showed their displeasure by deserting or not, the education of the Confederate soldier had an impact that resulted in a fundamental reorganization in how southerners understood the authority of the state and its operation. By the end of the Civil War, those Confederates soldiers who had survived the experience of battle and had remained loyal to the cause from beginning to end, counted themselves as part of a new constituency, with allegiances to a state that no longer existed, but with an understanding of what made that state work. In the

years that followed, Reconstruction would complete an education in statecraft that time spent in the Confederate Army had started, socializing white Mississippians not only in the architecture of what makes a modern state, but also in the more modern meanings of what it meant to be a modern citizen.