



THE GETTYSBURG COLLEGE JOURNAL OF THE CIVIL WAR ERA

Volume 5

Article 1

4-20-2015

Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era 2015

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/gcjwe>

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [History of Religion Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

(2015) "Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era 2015," *The Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era*: Vol. 5 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/gcjwe/vol5/iss1/1>

This open access complete issue is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era 2015

Keywords

Civil War, Ambrose Burnside, Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, Army of the Potomac, Ninth Corps, Heth's Salient, U.S. Navy, Mississippi River, Psychological Impact of War, Public Memory, Grand Army of the Republic, Nationalism, Slave, Slavery, Slaveholder, Slaveholding Ethic, Evangelical Christianity, Proslavery Christians, Antislavery Christians

GETTYSBURG COLLEGE



**JOURNAL
OF THE
CIVIL WAR ERA**

Volume 5, Spring 2015

Bryan G. Caswell
Editor

Kevin P. Lavery
Editor

**Heather L.
Clancy**
*Associate
Editor*

**Brianna E.
Kirk**
*Associate
Editor*

**Robert W.
Novak**
*Associate
Editor*

**Thomas
E. Nank**
*Associate
Editor*

**Steven J.
Semmel**
*Associate
Editor*

**Anika N.
Jensen**
*Associate
Editor*

**Julia E.
Sippel**
*Associate
Editor*

Dr. Peter S. Carmichael
Advisor

Cover Image: *Capture of Fort Henry by U.S. gun boats under the command of Flag Officer Foote, February 6th 1862. Courtesy of Library of Congress.*

Interested in getting published in the *Gettysburg College
Journal of the Civil War Era*?

If you or anyone you know has written an undergraduate paper in the past five years about the Civil War Era or its lasting memory and meets the following categories and requirements, then please consider visiting our website at <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/gcjwe/> and enter your work for consideration for next year's publication.

Requirements and Categories for Publication:

Submissions should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font and submitted as a Word document

1. Academic Essays: We are interested in original research with extensive use of primary and secondary sources. Possible Topics include but are not limited to military history, social history, race, reconstruction, memory, reconciliation, politics, the home front, etc. **6,000 words or less.**
2. Book Reviews: Any non-fiction Civil War related book published in the last two years. Authors should have knowledge of the relevant literature to review. **700 words or less.**
3. Historical Non-fiction Essays: This category is for non-fiction works regarding the Civil War that are not necessarily of an academic nature. Examples of this include essays in public history of the war, study of the re-enactment culture, current issues in the Civil War field such as the sesquicentennial, etc. Creativity is

encouraged in this category as long as it remains a non-fiction piece. **2,000 to 6,000 words.**

Any student with an interest in the Civil War may submit a piece, including graduate students as long as the work submitted is undergraduate work written within the past five years. If your submission is selected, your work will be published online and in a print journal, which you will receive a copy of for your own enjoyment.

A Letter from the Editors

We are thrilled to present you with the fifth volume of the Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era. It has been our pleasure to select the best of the submissions we received for this year's issue. Although we could not accept every submission, the opportunity to read through a fine array of undergraduate work allowed us new insights into the Civil War Era and the way in which it is being interpreted by budding young scholars.

We owe a great breadth of gratitude to our devoted team of associate editors: Heather Clancy ('15), Brianna Kirk ('15), Bobby Novak ('15), Steven Semmel ('16), Thomas Nank ('16), Anika Jensen ('18), and Julia Sippel ('18). In addition, we would like to extend our thanks to our advisor, Dr. Peter Carmichael, for providing guidance and support throughout the editorial process. Naturally, we are also indebted to our predecessors who served on the editorial board in years past and who blazed a trail for us to follow as we prepared this year's issue for publication.

This volume is comprised of three academic essays, our first-ever battle narrative, and a book review. Together, these pieces span the breadth of the field – from traditional and cultural military history to social and cultural history. The issue opens with “‘Servants, Obey Your Masters’: Southern Representations of the Religious Lives of Slaves” by Lindsey K. D. Wedow, who argues that the Southern justification of slavery relied in no small part upon contradictory assumptions about slaves' dependence on their masters for access to Christianity. In “Men and

Machines: The Psychological Impact of Gunboats on the Fort Henry and Donelson Campaign,” S. Marianne Johnson examines how the fear and awe inspired by ironclad gunboats was disproportionate to their efficacy in brown-water warfare. In his piece, Peter Bautz refutes the notion that Union veterans were passive or complicit in allowing the memory of the Civil War to be hijacked by reconciliationists in “The Memory of Battle Surrounds You Once Again: Iowa Grand Army of the Republic Reunions and the Formation of a Pro-Union Nationalism, 1886-1949.” In the first battle narrative ever published in our journal, Ryan T. Quint traces Ambrose Burnside’s return to the Army of the Potomac and discusses the role played by the Ninth Army Corps during the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House. We close with associate editor Brianna Kirk’s review of William A. Blair’s 2014 monograph *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era*.

It is our hope that this journal will provide you, our reader, with a sense of the great work being produced by the undergraduate students who represent the future of the field. We are thus incredibly proud of the 2015 volume of the Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era and hope you enjoy the outstanding work within.

Sincerely,

Bryan G. Caswell, Gettysburg College Class of 2015
Kevin P. Lavery, Gettysburg College Class of 2016

Contents

- 1** **“Servants, Obey Your Masters”:** Southern Representations of the Religious Lives of Slaves
Lindsey K. Wedow, Loyola University Chicago
Academic Essay
- 28** **Men and Machines: The Psychological Impact of Gunboats on the Fort Henry and Donelson Campaign**
S. Marianne Johnson, Gettysburg College
Academic Essay
- 55** **The Memory of Battle Surrounds You Once Again: Iowa Grand Army of the Republic Reunions and the Formation of a Pro-Union Nationalism, 1886-1949**
Peter Bautz, Grinnell College
Academic Essay
- 80** **Ambrose Burnside, the Ninth Army Corps, and the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House**
Ryan T. Quint, University of Mary Washington
Battle Narrative
- 108** ***With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era***
Brianna E. Kirk, Gettysburg College
Book Review

Contributors

Lindsey Wedow is a first-year Masters student at Loyola University Chicago, where she graduated in 2014 with undergraduate degrees in English and Theology.

S. Marianne Johnson is a senior at Gettysburg College. She is pursuing a major in History with a minor in Civil War Era Studies.

Peter Bautz is a senior at Grinnell College. He is pursuing majors in History and Political Science.

Ryan Quint is a senior at the University of Mary Washington. He is pursuing a major in History.

Brianna Kirk is a senior at Gettysburg College. She is pursuing an American Studies major, with minors in Education and Civil War Era Studies.

“Servants, Obey Your Masters”: Southern Representations of the Religious Lives of Slaves

Lindsey K. Wedow

In 1841 white members of the First Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia constructed a new church building. The old church building, which had previously housed a multiracial congregation, was purchased by the congregation's black members and effectively became known as the First African Baptist Church. White members of the First Baptist Church in Richmond had been uncomfortable for some time with the fact that white Christians were a minority at the church. It was therefore determined that the white and black members of the congregation would disjoin and worship in separate buildings.¹ Robert Ryland, minister thereafter of the First African Baptist Church in Richmond described this split, explaining that

Some very fastidious people did not like to resort to a church where so many colored folks congregated, and this was thought to operate against the growth of the white portion of the audience. The discipline and culture of the colored people, too, were felt by the pastor to be a heavy burden to his mind, requiring more time and attention than he could give them, and yet satisfy the expectations of the whites. After long and mature consultation, it was decided to build a new and more tasteful edifice for the whites,

¹ Rev. Robert Ryland, *Reminiscences of the First African Church in Richmond* (VA: American Baptist Memorial, 1855), 262.

Widow

and to dispose of the old one to the blacks, for their exclusive accommodation.²

This split of a community of worshippers into two on the basis of race reveals much about the relationship between white and black Christians in the years leading up to and during the American Civil War. Following Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831 it was determined by the majority of slaveholders and proslavery individuals that allowing slaves to hold religious gatherings without the supervision of white persons was too dangerous. Specifically, the fear was that slaves would use religious meetings as a cover for planning further rebellion. Yet still feeling it a duty to provide slaves with religious instruction, it became common practice for Southern churches to allow multiracial congregations.

Thus, on the one hand, the founding of the First African Baptist Church in Richmond looks like an excellent opportunity for black Christians to gain their own church building and some religious independence. Yet what this instance also reveals is the strained paternalism that was the foundation of proslavery Christianity. By analyzing proslavery evangelical representations of the religious instruction of slaves we begin to understand how proslavery evangelicals truly believed themselves to be doing the work of God. When the institution of slavery came under attack from antislavery evangelicals and abolitionists, proslavery evangelicals constructed an elaborate defense based on their perception of themselves as God's chosen actors. This defense, and the strong religious zeal that informed it, helped to bring about the American Civil War and to perpetuate the conflict. Each

² Ryland, *Reminiscences of the First African Church*, 262-263.

side felt that they were justified by God almighty and that they had a duty to fight to the bitter end.

This paper examines sources ranging from sermons by proslavery evangelicals and articles in proslavery religious periodicals, to books published by proslavery evangelicals and the public records of societies devoted to the religious education of slaves. Though many of these sources have been examined by scholars before, they have not necessarily been examined with an eye to depictions of slave’s religious education and what those depictions have to say about the motives and beliefs of proslavery Christians. This paper contends that when read through a critical lens, sermons offer insight into how proslavery Christians used representations of the religious lives of slaves to construct a justification for the institution of slavery. When viewed in the specifically evangelical context of the American South, this justification reveals some important contradictions. First, in order to maintain a defense of slavery, proslavery Christians were forced to contradict their own belief in, and celebration of, the free accessibility of Christ’s salvation. Proslavery Christians, though they were evangelicals, represented slaves as in need of the mediation of white Christians in order to achieve salvation. This insistence on the permanent need for white mediation resulted in a depiction of the spiritual condition of slaves as constantly in a state of disrepair. Thus while the aid of white Christians was supposed to bring about the salvation of slaves, and missionaries always seemed to report positive spiritual improvement among their slave congregations, proslavery Christians also had to maintain a permanent position for themselves as spiritual instructors in order to justify slaveholding to the rest of the world. Therefore we find then in documents from the period contradictory representations of the religious lives of

slaves which are strategically crafted to serve the purposes of proslavery Christians.

As famously described by David Bebbington, evangelicalism is marked by four distinctive elements. First, evangelicals practice conversionism, in which new believers are expected to depart with their former habits and completely change their lives; this is commonly called being “born again.”³ Secondly, evangelicals employ biblicism, meaning that they take the Bible as highly authoritative and often identify directly with the biblical text.⁴ Next, evangelicals exercise what Bebbington calls “crucicentrism,” which places emphasis on the saving grace of Christ’s death and resurrection; the salvation offered by Jesus is central to Protestantism in general, but is even more paramount for evangelicalism.⁵ Lastly, evangelicals are said to engage in activism, meaning that they choose to express their faith in a strikingly passionate manner. For this reason a great deal of emphasis is placed upon zealous preaching and proselytizing.⁶ These doctrines of evangelical Christianity shaped the culture of the Southern United States, giving rise to strict codes of honor and duty and a vision of the South as a place of Christian tradition.

Proslavery Southerners believed that God had given them the South and all of its prosperity as a blessing. This blessing included the institution of slavery. Rev. Robert Wightman expressed these sentiments in an 1861 sermon that he delivered to the congregation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Yorkville, S.C. saying,

³ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 2003), 8.

⁴ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 10.

⁵ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 13.

⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 15.

“Servants, Obey Your Masters”

They are the gifts of God. The pillar of cloud dropped fertilizing dew on our soil, and the pillar of fire brought across the ocean the only tillers who could survive pestilence, and wring from the sod the bloom of silver and harvests of gold. God blessed our land, and gave to Ham the privilege of mitigating his “curse” by spreading Christianity with the labor of his hands.⁷

Here, Wightman demonstrates the opinion held by many proslavery Christians that they were the chosen people of God and as such had a right and a duty to defend what had been entrusted to them. The quote also exposes how proslavery Christians used established beliefs about the inferiority and wretchedness of African peoples to justify their own actions. Wightman draws on the well-established idea that African peoples were descendants of Ham, the son whom Noah cursed in the book of Genesis. This served to take the responsibility for slavery off of proslavery Christians and place it on the will of God as mediated through the actions of Noah. This also allowed Proslavery Christians to claim that the argument that slavery defied Christianity was blasphemous since the enslavement of African peoples was clearly intended by God.

Thus we see what Bebbington refers to as *biblicism* at work. The insistence on a literal interpretation of the Bible became perhaps the key element of the debate between antislavery and proslavery evangelical Christians. Proslavery Christians saw themselves as the chosen heirs of a rich, fertile promised land, much like the Israelites of the Old Testament. Meanwhile their Northern brethren had to

⁷ Rev. John T. Wightman, “The Glory of God: The Defense of the South: A Discourse Delivered in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South” (ME, 1871), 8.

etch out a living in the cold, harsh climates of the North. This fed into an established Southern Christian conceptualization of Southerners as the keepers of the true Christianity.⁸ Northerners, with their abolitionist and capitalist ideas, had strayed away from the true religion and subsequently had not received the same abundant blessings. These ideas were later shattered by the outcome of the Civil War, but they were central to the way in which proslavery evangelicals understood themselves as opposed to antislavery evangelicals. Proslavery Christians also attempted to deflect the responsibility for slavery from themselves by accusing Northerners of making slavery necessary with their money hungry capitalist economy.⁹

Because evangelicals understood the Bible to be completely authoritative it became imperative to both antislavery and proslavery Christians that they were able to prove that the Bible either did or did not sanction slavery. This explains the staggering volume of writing from both sides attempting to demonstrate how Biblical scripture could be used to justify their cause.¹⁰ Proslavery evangelicals insisted that because the Bible contains examples of the great men of God, such as Noah and Moses, holding slaves it must have meant that it was permissible for Southern planters to hold slaves as well. Proslavery evangelicals also seized on the Epistle of Philemon in which the apostle Paul wrote to a Christian man named Philemon in order to return his runaway slave, Onesimus. Proslavery evangelicals selectively highlighted that Paul was proposing to return Onesimus to Philemon

⁸ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 52.

⁹ Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 53.

¹⁰ Albert J. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), 81-82.

and paid little attention to the rest of the epistle in which Paul implored Philemon to receive Onesimus not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. Proslavery Christians also frequently drew on verses like 1 Corinthians 7:20-24 that focused on the importance of being content with one’s station in life.¹¹

The response from antislavery evangelicals could not be as directly literal in its interpretation. The actual words printed in the Bible do in fact reveal that the patriarchs owned slaves, and do affirm without any reproach that slaveholding was common practice in the Roman society that both Christ and later Paul inhabited. Because of this, some radical abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison rejected the Bible out of hand as a proslavery book. However, moderate antislavery evangelicals strove to cultivate a more nuanced biblical interpretation which relied on Christian humanitarianism for its strength.¹² Thus antislavery Christians such as James G. Birney tried to refute proslavery evangelicals with logical explanations for the Bible’s lack of antislavery text. Birney wrote,

The Savior himself said nothing in condemnation of slavery, although it existed in great aggravation while he was on earth. He said nothing about it, and to my apprehension, for this very good reason, that he did not preach to the Romans, or to the people of any other country where slavery prevailed, but to the Jews, among whom the abolition principles of Moses’

¹¹ *The New American Bible* (NY, 2011). 1 Corinthians 7:20 reads “Everyone should remain in the state in which he was called.”

¹² Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 35.

laws had already very nearly, if not entirely extinguished it.¹³

Birney went on to argue that just because the Bible describes the patriarchs holding slaves it did not mean that God ever intended for white Southerners to become slaveholders.

Birney's letter also pointed to another enormous contention between proslavery and antislavery evangelicals. In the worldview of evangelicals every person was responsible for repenting and seeking reconciliation with Christ. Thus denying slaves the opportunity to read the Bible or to gain any religious instruction was as good as condemning them to hell. This, antislavery evangelicals said, was the true horror of slavery.

But slaves were not the only ones in danger of losing their souls according to antislavery Christians. Slaveholders were also corrupted by slavery. Being in a constant position of power and possessing the liberty to inflict punishment and pain on another human being inevitably caused a person to become apathetic to human suffering.¹⁴ Slavery also presented strong temptation toward vice for slaveholders, as evidenced by the immense number of masters who had illegitimate children with their female slaves. Antislavery Christians argued that slavery could not possibly be consistent with the gospel because God would never approve of an institution that bred such cruelty and corruption.

Thus the argument over slavery and the condemnations of the moral condition of both slaves and

¹³ James G. Birney, "Letter to Ministers and Elders, on the Sin of Holding Slaves, and the Duty of Immediate Emancipation", (NY: S.W. Benedict and Co., 1834), 3.

¹⁴ Birney, "Letter to Ministers and Elders", 2.

slaveholders by antislavery Christians brought about the formation of the paternalistic slaveholding ethic. This debate also provided a strong impetus for the proslavery church to advance missionary work to slaves. If proslavery Christians wanted to have any ground to stand on, they had to prove that those who participated in the institution of slavery could maintain a high standard of moral conduct. In order to combat the accusation that slavery was detrimental to the souls of both slaves and slaveholders, proslavery Christians used the Bible to construct a paternalistic system in which it was taught that slaves and slaveholders each had duties unto one another. The basis for this system was the all-too-familiar idea that white Christians had a God-given responsibility to spread their religion and culture amongst the “heathen” peoples of the world.

As Presbyterian Reverend John C. Young stated in his sermon entitled “The Duty of Masters”, “The moralist and the Christian defend the practice of holding human beings in bondage, only on the ground that they are incompetent to govern themselves and manage their own interests successfully.”¹⁵ Therefore proslavery Christians could comfort themselves with the idea that their slaves were better off in the United States where they could learn about Christianity and how to live respectably. This sentiment had been expressed by Rev. William Meade of Virginia in 1834. His “Pastoral Letter” was reprinted and circulated widely in the years leading up to and during the Civil War. Rev. Meade wrote,

¹⁵ Rev. John C. Young, “The Duty of Masters: A Sermon Preached in Danville, Kentucky in 1846, and then Published At the Unanimous Request of the Presbyterian Church, Danville (NY: John A. Gray, 1858), 45.

When we remember how their captive fathers were brought from a land of Pagan darkness and cruelty to one of Christian light, and compare the religious advantages which their descendants may have, with the horrible superstitions which yet prevail in Africa, there is a pleasing consolation in the thought that, notwithstanding much of evil in their present condition, great spiritual good may result to their unhappy race through the knowledge of a Redeemer. But this must be done through the instrumentality of man; and it becomes us as Christians to inquire how far we are concurring with the designs of Providence and seeking to promote this most desirable object.¹⁶

This quote from Rev. Meade reveals that the underlying principal of the slaveholding ethic was that slavery was ultimately redemptive to the souls of slaves. Proslavery Christians drew their support for this claim from “biblical stories of the curse of Ham and the punishment of Cain.”¹⁷ The majority of white Christians understood little to nothing of African cultures, but as Rev. Meade demonstrates they assumed that African religions were nothing but evil superstition and that practicing them was a sign of ignorance. Previously white discomfort with African religions had been a large problem. By the time the Civil War took place the majority of slaves in the United States had been born and raised in the United States. Though a large number of slaves were members of an

¹⁶ William Meade, “Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend William Meade” (VA: Convocation of Central Virginia 1853), 13.

¹⁷ David B. Chesebrough, ed. “*God Ordained This War*”: *Sermons on the Sectional Crisis* (SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 147.

evangelical church, white Christians still characterized their slaves as practitioners of traditional African religions or at least as being heavily influenced by them.¹⁸ This made it easier to claim that slaves were naturally given to a heathenish nature and thus required the guidance of white Christians. Importantly, it also provided white Christians with a constant source of work yet to be done.

Many slaveholders claimed that anyone who had spent time around slaves knew that they were an enormous burden to their masters. Lack of work ethic from slaves was a popular complaint among slaveholders. Not only did this perceived laziness offend their idea of the Protestant work ethic, but it also caused slaveholders to feel that they were investing more in their slaves than they were getting back. In his sermon “The Duty of Masters”, Kentucky Presbyterian minister Rev. John C. Young describes how he believes the Bible is capable of improving the naturally inferior characters of slaves. Rev. Young writes,

“The main precept to the servant meets this evil by enjoining upon him *faithfulness and energy* in all that he does: ‘Whatever ye do, do it heartily.’ And mark the peculiarity of the motive by which this precept is enforced, and its adaptation to counteract the force of their temptation – ‘knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance.’ *Here* is what is needed by the servant – a reward held out to quicken his sluggish spirit.”¹⁹

As he describes later in the quote the “evil” that Young is referring to is the sluggish spirit that many slaveholders

¹⁸ Chesebrough, ed. “God Ordained This War, 148.

¹⁹ Young, “The Duty of Masters”, 40.

reported as prominent amongst their slaves. Young explains how the lessons of the Bible can help to improve the laziness of slaves. Thus men like Young and Meade firmly believed that slavery was the means through which the souls of slaves would be saved.

By creating this picture of slaves as in need of ethical reform proslavery Christians gave themselves a basis on which to build the rest of their slaveholding ethic. They also created a way to undermine the accusations of antislavery evangelicals. In order to combat antislavery Christian arguments that slaves ought to be freed, proslavery Christians pointed to what they saw as the degraded lives of freepersons living in the North. In his popular work *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*, Charles C. Jones, a minister, missionary, and slaveholding planter in Liberty County, Georgia, discussed what he sees as the debased existence of freepersons in the Northern states. Jones wrote,

Their physical condition in the *slave states*, on the whole, is *decidedly in advance* of what it is in the *free states*. There are more free colored *families* in the slave than in the free states: in the latter the young cannot marry, the support of a family, especially through the rigors of winter being difficult; and consequently numbers of youth, abandon themselves to profligacy.²⁰

According to proslavery Christians like Rev. Robert Ryland, “the altruism and recklessness of the North on this subject” was responsible for the deplorable living

²⁰ Charles C. Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (GA: Thomas Purse, 1842), 121.

conditions of blacks in the free states.²¹ They believed that the antislavery emphasis on the equality of all persons was wholly misguided. Freeing slaves, they believed, would put responsibilities on them that they could not handle. This of course would eventually lead to freepersons falling into a life of vice and moral degeneracy. Therefore antislavery Christians, in insisting that slaves should be freed, were in fact doing slaves a disservice by facilitating the damnation of their souls. Slaves were better off in the care of their masters who could see to it that they did not go astray and could afford them the opportunity to correct their tendencies toward immorality. Rev. Ryland describes the effect that he believed religious instruction was having on his black congregation at the First African Baptist Church, “They have less superstition, less reliance on dreams and visions, they talk less of the palpable guidings of the spirit as independent of or opposed to the word of God.”²² Thus Rev. Ryland draws once again on the proslavery Christian depiction of slaves as practitioners of “heathenish” superstition. Ryland is claiming that the tendency toward superstition is diminishing within his congregation. Yet by the very act of invoking a representing of slaves as “heathenish”, Ryland is bringing to mind that there are other slaves yet to be saved and much more work for proslavery Christians to do.

The notion that slaves were better off under the care of a master hinged on the assumption that all masters were kind and fatherly toward their slaves, always promoting their well-being. The real crux of the slaveholding ethic was its demand that slave owners hold themselves to a high level of morality and always strive to behave benevolently

²¹ Ryland, *Reminiscences of the First African Church*, 292.

²² Ryland, *Reminiscences of the First African Church*, 265.

toward their slaves. Slave owners were to give to their slaves what was due to them according to God.²³ This gave proslavery Christians the ability to argue that slaveholders, though they received financial gain from their slaves, were actually taking on a Christian burden by being slaveholders. Proslavery publications and sermons of the period typically started out with the sentiment that slavery was an enormous burden on the South, one that she would likely be better off without, but that since Southerners were now responsible for the slave population it was their Christian duty to care for them as well as was possible.²⁴ A group of ministers from Columbia, South Carolina described well the idea that slaveholders had a responsibility to their slaves when they offered a definition of slavery in an article in *The Southern Presbyterian Review*. The ministers wrote,

In return for this service, he is to exercise over them a just and equal authority, restraining them, by appropriate rewards and disciplinary inflictions, from idleness, vice, and immorality. He is to protect them from wrong and outrage on the part of others; to nourish them in helpless infancy and feeble old age; to treat them with kindness, and to feel towards them the regard to which they are entitled as servants of his house and the subjects of his family-government.²⁵

²³ Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 173.

²⁴ Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 178.

²⁵ “An Association of Ministers” in Columbia, SC, *The Southern Presbyterian Review* Vol. 14 (SC: C.P. Pelham, 1861), 33-34.

While antislavery opposition remained strong, the church teachings about the duties of masters were quite effective in persuading many that slavery, though distasteful, did not defy God and was therefore not evil.²⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted was a famous American landscape architect, journalist, and social critic from Connecticut.²⁷ Olmsted travelled around the Southern United States in order to gain a first-hand view of slavery and wrote his observation in a work entitled *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*. In this work Olmsted describes the demeanor of a Southern planter with whom he was lodging toward his slaves. Olmsted writes, “In his own case, at least, I did not doubt; his manner toward them was paternal – familiar and kind; and they came to him like children who have been given some task, and constantly are wanting to be encouraged and guided, simply and confidently.”²⁸ Proslavery representations of slaves as child-like contented beings living under the care of a kind father figure were effective in combating antislavery representations of slaves as brutalized, dejected creatures living under the harsh dictatorship of a Simon Legree.

The years leading up to and during the Civil War saw a great deal of concern among proslavery Christians that slaves receive religious instruction.²⁹ Evangelizing

²⁶ Mark Noll, *America's God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 388.

²⁷ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States* (NY: Mason Brothers, 1861), 1.

²⁸ Frederick Law Olmsted. *The Cotton Kingdom*, 54.

²⁹ John B. Boles, *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South 1740-1870* (KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 109.

slaves and instructing them in the teachings of God was one way to give legitimacy to the entire institution of slavery which was under heavy attack by abolitionists. Proslavery ministers, many of them slaveholders themselves, thundered from the pulpit that though slavery was not evil or fundamentally wrong, there was one significant problem with the system: every single proslavery Christian could be doing more to foster the religious education of slaves.

Though the mission to the slaves was encouraged by virtually all proslavery Christians, it was perhaps implemented most zealously in Liberty County, Georgia. Charles C. Jones, a Presbyterian minister and planter in Liberty County became the leader of the missionary effort there. Jones was born to a wealthy planter in Liberty County and spent some time in the North while attending Andover seminary in Massachusetts.³⁰ While at Andover, Jones experienced some serious doubts about the righteousness of slavery. Jones was bothered by a system which held human beings in bondage. He wrote to his fiancée of his confusion,

I am moreover undecided whether I ought to hold slaves. As to the principle of slavery, it is wrong! It is unjust and contrary to nature and religion to hold men enslaved. But the question is, in my present circumstances, with the evil of my hands entailed from my father, would the general interest of the slaves and community at large, with reference to the slaves themselves, be promoted best, by emancipation? Could I do more for the ultimate good of the slave

³⁰ Erskine Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in the Old South* (GA: John Knox Press, 1979), 10-11.

population by holding or emancipating what I own?³¹

Despite his reservations about slavery, after graduating from Andover Jones returned to Liberty County and became a slaveholding planter like his father. Jones was always unsure about slavery, and so in an attempt to both distinguish himself from abolitionists and still take action that he believed would improve the lives of slaves, he threw himself into missionary work among the slave population.³² Jones was responsible for founding the “Liberty County Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes” and for persuading other planters and ministers from Liberty County to join.³³

Jones was surely not the only proslavery evangelical to hold reservations about the institution of slavery, but his case does offer an alternative view of the slaveholding ethic. Other proslavery evangelicals like Virginia’s Thornton Stringfellow viewed slavery as an evil in the South which had to be mitigated through a missionary effort.³⁴ The institution of slavery was a deeply engrained part of Southern culture, one that allowed the Southern aristocracy to maintain their life of leisure and wealth. Men like Jones and Stringfellow had been indoctrinated into the institution of slavery since their births, but nonetheless held a distaste for the institution.³⁵

³¹ “Charles Jones to Mary Jones” (1830, JCTU), Erskine Clarke. *Wrestlin’ Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in the Old South* (GA: John Knox Press, 1979), 14.

³² Erskine Clarke. *Wrestlin’ Jacob*, 15.

³³ Erskine Clarke. *Wrestlin’ Jacob*, 28.

³⁴ Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 215. Stringfellow was a Baptist minister in Virginia who wrote and preached in favor of preserving slavery in spite of his distaste for the institution.

³⁵ Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 217.

Many ministers, whether as admissions of personal opinion or as rhetorical strategy, admitted that slavery was an evil. Thus slavery existed in an oddly contradictory position: it was an evil, but one that proslavery Christians nonetheless fought fiercely to defend.

In his book *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* Jones set out to explore the religious and moral condition of slaves. He claimed that the vast majority of slaves live in a state of moral ignorance and degradation and were therefore in desperate need of corrective teaching from ministers and missionaries.³⁶ He stressed the importance of the mission to the slaves by putting forth a representation of them as a class of helpless persons. Jones insisted, "It is not too much, therefore to say that the Negroes are in a state of almost absolute dependence on their owners for the words of eternal life. They are the most *needy* of any people in our country."³⁷ The idea that slaves needed white Christians in order to acquire salvation was at the very heart of the slaveholding ethic.

Even if proslavery Christians could prove that slavery was being used to accomplish righteous work, they still had a big problem to get around. Specifically, the concept that white mediation was necessary for black salvation contradicted the evangelical belief that salvation is given freely to anyone who asks for it. Evangelicals celebrated the liberating nature of their religion because it moved away from the need for any sort of intercessor in order to gain forgiveness and salvation. Yet in the slaveholding ethic that they created they set themselves up as necessary intercessors for their slaves. Without the built-

³⁶ Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes*, 125.

³⁷ Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes*, 158

in need for white involvement the entire slaveholding ethic would have come tumbling down. Because proslavery Christians believed that slaves were more like children than adults, they created a role for themselves as necessary guardians and caregivers.

At the heart of the slaveholding ethic was a belief that people of color were fundamentally different from white people in a way that rendered them closer to children than adults. George W. Freeman, a minister in North Carolina expressed in one of two discourses entitled “The Rights and Duties of Slaveholders” the belief that slaves could be thought of as perpetual children. In discussing slaveholders’ duties to care for the immortal souls of their slaves Freeman wrote,

Our children, we all feel and acknowledge, have decided claims of this sort upon us. And in what respect, brethren, does the relation which we bear in this matter to our children, differ from that in which we stand to our slaves? They are both providentially placed under our protection. They are equally dependent upon us – especially subject to our authority – and they alike stand in need of our help and guidance in the all-important concern of working out their salvation.³⁸

This comparison between children and slaves was extremely popular and well-versed for explaining why slavery was beneficial to slaves.

Yet as Freeman goes on to discuss, slaveholders did recognize some differences between their slaves and their children. Children eventually grow up, become independent

³⁸ George W. Freeman, “The Rights and Duties of Slaveholders: Two Discourses” (SC: A.E. Miller, 1937), 30.

adults, and leave home. Yet for slaves, “their state of pupilage never ceases; they are always with us; they are always members of our families; they are always subject to our authority and control.”³⁹ Slaves were to be handled as children with love and compassion, but it was also necessary to recognize that they were different from white children. While the slaveholding ethic insisted on the importance of maintaining the physical comfort of slaves by providing adequate food, shelter, and clothing, the linchpin that held the entire argument together was the accountability of slaveholders for the religious instruction and education of their slaves. It was the mission to the slaves that proslavery Christians believed gave slaveholding its true value and justifiability.

It was widely claimed that slaves were slow learners and could only handle simple material. Ministers and teachers, much like slaveholders, were to exercise patience and restraint when working with slaves. In his collection of sermons intended for slaves, Presbyterian minister Rev. A.F. Dickson offered specific instructions to teachers for how lessons should be conducted. Dickson wrote,

They are sensitive to cold, to constrained attitudes, and to distracting influences of every kind; On the other hand, the subjects to be dwelt upon are more or less abstract, and therefore arduous to their awkward minds; and your language, simple and familiar as it seems to you, is yet somewhat removed from their colloquial dialect, and so far forth foreign to them. Then you need to make the whole business as inviting

³⁹ Freeman, “The Rights and Duties of Slaveholders,” 31.

“Servants, Obey Your Masters”

to them as possible. A sullen, discontented listener is already lost to any hope of benefit.⁴⁰

Passages like this one from Rev. Dickson illustrate how deeply white Christians believed they were needed by their slaves. This idea was essential both to combating antislavery arguments that slaves ought to be emancipated as well as to the proslavery understanding of themselves as performing merciful work.

But this system of special instruction did not come with expectations solely for teachers and ministers. Slaves were expected to take the lessons to heart and to implement them in order to become better, more obedient servants. This is apparent in the incredible number of sermons preached by proslavery ministers to black congregations that emphasized the importance and virtue of obedience. One such minister, Alexander Glennie, a native of Scotland, originally came to the United States in order to tutor a wealthy planter's son. Though Glennie himself was a minister in the Protestant Episcopal Church, his books of plantation sermons were used widely by evangelicals in their efforts to teach slaves about Christianity. In sermon four of his *Sermons Preached on Plantations to Congregations of Negroes*, Glennie gave a well-worn lesson about the duty of slaves to be obedient. The passage offered as justification was a favorite among proslavery Christians, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.”⁴¹ Slaves became extremely familiar with this verse, as nearly all sermons preached to them by white ministers had something to do

⁴⁰ Rev. A.F. Dickson, *Lessons About Salvation* (PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1860), 6.

⁴¹ *The New American Bible*. Ephesians 6:5.

Widow

with the theme of obedience. Glennie went on to say in this sermon,

You are here directed to be obedient to your master 'with fear and trembling.' That is, you ought to feel so anxious to discharge your duty faithfully, as to feel afraid of giving offence by any conduct that looks like disobedience; for, by disobedience, you not only offend your earthly master, but you sin against God, and of this every Christian servant will be afraid. A bad servant will be afraid only of the punishment he will receive, if his disobedience should be found out. But a Christian servant must look up always to his heavenly master.⁴²

This passage, and the frequency with which Ephesians 6:5 was used in sermons preached to black congregations, is telling of the motives of proslavery Christians. The focus of slave instruction became molding slaves into better workers. It is easy to see the selfish motivation in this, yet nonetheless proslavery Christians insisted that by making slaves into better workers they were helping them fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

Advocates of missionary work to slaves mostly maintained an attitude of extreme optimism toward the progress of the cause. One such organization that displayed this attitude was Charles Jones' Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia. The Association published yearly reports about their activities and progress for the year and always had good news to report. The Association said of the religious

⁴² Alexander Glennie, *Sermons Preached on Plantations to Congregations of Negroes* (SC: Miller, 1844), 23.

meetings that they encouraged masters to hold for their slaves “A kind providence has specially smiled upon these meetings.”⁴³ The report goes on to provide a section in which slaveholders in Liberty County wrote in and responded to a series of questions about the religious instruction of slaves. Slaveholders were asked if they had any objection whatsoever to the religious instruction of slaves, to which every responder replied no.⁴⁴ They were also asked if they had any suggestions for improvement to which everyone replied that they either had no suggestions or only suggested that more teachers and missionaries be provided.⁴⁵ Lastly, slaveholders were asked if they had noticed any change in their slaves, to which every responder replied that their slaves had become more obedient, more trustworthy, and all around better servants.⁴⁶ This document demonstrates how careful and guarded proslavery Christians were in their justifications of slavery. Organizations like the Association were under a great deal of pressure to demonstrate success, therefore they made sure that the picture looked good.

In the years leading up to and during the American Civil War, evangelical proslavery Christians were aware that they were under heavy attack from antislavery Christians. In response proslavery Christians crafted a deeply paternalistic ethic in which slaveholding was not only acceptable, but righteous. In a country as steeped in evangelical Christianity as the United States, the upper hand would go to whomever could adequately prove that their cause was supported by the Bible and therefore by

⁴³ *8th Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia* (GA: Thomas Purse, 1843), 4.

⁴⁴ *8th Annual Report*, 33.

⁴⁵ *8th Annual Report*, 33.

⁴⁶ *8th Annual Report*, 34.

God. The trouble was that both sides were able to provide evidence that the Bible supported their cause. Therefore even though most proslavery Christians genuinely believed in their paternalistic defense of slavery, that paternalism was always strained because the Bible, the ultimate source of guidance, could not definitively say one way or another whether slavery was acceptable. This strain perhaps arose from the fact that the paternalistic slaveholding ethic, though proslavery Christians tried desperately to prove otherwise, contradicted the evangelical belief in free salvation for every person. Yes, salvation was still available to slaves, but according to proslavery Christians, the moral condition of slaves was so degraded that they would never attain salvation without white mediation. All of this depended on carefully crafted representations of slaves as ignorant, incapable, and dependent. Thus it becomes readily apparent that slaveholding religion, though it professed to be for the betterment of slaves, was truly for the benefit of slaveholders. This strain weighed heavily on men such as Charles Jones and Thornton Stringfellow and undoubtedly on countless others. In the rhetoric of proslavery ministers slaves existed in a perpetual childhood that needed to be directed toward salvation by white Christians. The fighting on the battlefield was thus being fueled by another brutal fight taking place in pulpits across the nation.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

“An Association of Ministers” in Columbia, SC.
The Southern Presbyterian Review Vol. 14.
Columbia, SC: Steam-power press of C.P. Pelham,
1861.

*8th Annual Report of the Association for the
Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty
County, Georgia.* Savannah, GA: Thomas Purse,
1843.

Birney, James G. “Letter to Ministers and Elders,
on the Sin of Holding Slaves, and the Duty of
Immediate Emancipation.” New York: S.W.
Benedict and Co., 1834.

Dickson, Rev. A.F. *Lesssons About Salvation; From
the Life and Words of the Lord Jesus. Being a
Second Series of Plantation Sermons.* Philadelphia:
Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1860.

Freeman, George W. “The Rights and Duties of
Slaveholders: Two Discourses.” Charleston: A.E.
Miller, Printer to the Society, 1837.

Glennie, Alexander. *Sermons Preached on
Plantations to Congregations of Negroes.*
Charleston: Miller, 1844.

Wedow

Jones, Charles C, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*. Savannah, GA: Thomas Purse, 1842.

Meade, Rev. William, "Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend William Meade." Virginia: Reprinted by the Convocation of Central Virginia, 1853.

Olmsted, Frederick Law. *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*. New York: Mason Brothers, 1861.

Ryland, Robert. *Reminiscences of the First African Church in Richmond, VA*. Richmond: American Baptist Memorial, 1855.

Wightman, Rev. John T. "The Glory of God: The Defense of the South: A Discourse Delivered in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South." Portland, ME: Thurston & Co., 1871.

Young, Rev. John . "The Duty of Masters: A Sermon Preached in Danville, Kentucky in 1846, and then Published at the Unanimous Request of the Presbyterian Church, Danville." New York: John A. Gray, 1858.

Secondary Sources

Bebbington, David. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. Routledge, 2003.

- Boles, John B. *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South 1740-1870*. Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1988.
- Chesebrough, David B., ed. “*God Ordained This War*”: *Sermons on the Sectional Crisis*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991.
- Clarke, Erskine. *Wrestlin’ Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in the Old South*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979.
- Harrill, J. Albert. *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*. Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995.
- Irons, Charles F. *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- The New American Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Noll, Mark. *America’s God*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Noll, Mark. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Men and Machines: The Psychological Impact of Gunboats on the Fort Henry and Donelson Campaign

S. Marianne Johnson

In an age of steam and industry, the ironclad warship represents the pinnacle of the Industrial Revolution. Although ironclads had been in existence in France and Britain in the 1850s, the American Civil War demonstrated the first time these gunboats were put to use in ship to ship warfare en masse.¹ Today, ironclads are seen as one of the great technological achievements of the Civil War, but their conception and birth were surrounded by doubts and fears. Despite their intrigue, there has not been an in-depth study of the psychological effects of these revolutionary weapons on the men serving in and those opposing them. The closest study is Gary Joiner's chapter on the timberclads *Lexington* and *Tyler* at the Battle of Shiloh.² The bulk of the primary source material has come from the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies* and the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Tracing the planning, building, and deployment of the first gunboats in the Western Gunboat Flotilla from late 1861 through the Forts Henry and Donelson campaign in February of 1862 explains how the ironclads came to be remembered as a symbol of Yankee power and invincibility.

¹ Ervan G. Garrison, "Three Ironclad Warships—The Archaeology of Industrial Process and Historical Myth," *Historical Archaeology* 29, no. 4 (1995), 27.

² Joiner's chapter has largely served as the template for this piece. Gary Joiner, "Soul Stirring Music to Our Ears: Gunboats at Shiloh," in *The Shiloh Campaign*, ed. Steven Woodworth (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 96-109.

When Union General Winfield Scott introduced the Anaconda Plan, a design to isolate the Confederacy and squeeze it into submission, a crucial part of the plan was to control the Mississippi River and cut the Confederacy in half.³ To do so, the Department of the Navy began to consider the possibility of ironclad gunboats to conquer and control the river. The Department sent orders to Captain John Rodgers on May 16, 1861, sending him to General George McClellan's Headquarters at Cincinnati "in regard to the expediency of establishing a Naval Armament on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, or either of them, with a view of blockading or interdicting communication and interchanges with the states that are in insurrections."⁴ The orders went on to state that this operation would be under the supervision of the Army and that Rodgers would be subordinate to McClellan.⁵ After communicating with McClellan, Rodgers bought three steamships to be converted into timberclads, the *Conestoga*, *Lexington*, and *A. O. Taylor*.⁶ Rodgers changed the name *Taylor* to *Tyler* due his personal aversion to President Zachary Taylor, viewed at the time as a part of the 'Slave Power Conspiracy' for his involvement in the Mexican Cession.⁷ Rodgers purchased the ships for the "aggregate"⁸ price of

³ Gary Joiner, *Mr. Lincoln's Brownwater Navy: The Mississippi Squadron* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 9.

⁴ Orders from Department of the Navy to Captain John Rodgers, May 16, 1861. Rodgers Family Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵ Orders of Dept. of Navy, Rodgers Family Papers.

⁶ A timberclad was similar in structure to an ironclad, but as its name suggests, was armored with thick planks of timber instead of iron plating.

⁷ Report, June 8, 1861, Rodgers Family Papers.

⁸ Report, June 8, 1861, Rodgers Family Papers.

\$62,000 and predicted that at least another \$41,000 would be necessary to strengthen and outfit them for battle.

In addition to timberclads, a contract for ironclad gunboats, later to be known as city-class ironclads, was announced.⁹ In the summer of 1861, advertisements began to appear in newspapers across the North encouraging shipbuilders to submit their proposals for ironclads. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* announced on June 3, 1861 that shipbuilders should submit their proposals to the Navy Bureau of Construction by June 15.¹⁰ On July 27, *The Daily Picayune* in New Orleans reported that plans had been accepted and the gunboats would be built at Cincinnati.¹¹ John Lenthall was the first to try to design the boats, but abandoned the project because of doubts. After withdrawing from the project, the task fell to his subordinate, Samuel Pook.¹²

In order to minimize vulnerability, Pook moved the single paddle wheel into the middle of the ship, inside the carapace. This provided decent protection at the expense of maneuverability; turning would be difficult. James Buchanan Eads won the contract to build seven ironclads using a layout similar to that of the timberclads based on Pook's designs at \$89,600 per ship, nearly four times what Lenthall had originally quoted.¹³ In December of 1861, the

⁹ Joiner, *Brownwater Navy*, 25.

¹⁰ "The New Gunboats," *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston, MA) Monday, June 3, 1861; Issue 131; col. D.

¹¹ "The New Gunboats to be Built at Cincinnati for the United States Government," *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA) Saturday, July 27, 1861; col E.

¹² John D. Milligan, "From Theory to Application: The Emergence of the American Ironclad War Vessel," *Military Affairs* 48, no. 3 (July, 1984), 126.

¹³ Joiner, *Brownwater Navy*, 25; *ORN* 22:387; Milligan, "From Theory to Application," 127.

Department of the Navy asked Congress for twelve million dollars for the ironclad program, more than the Navy's entire budget for 1860.¹⁴ The Western Flotilla began its journey as a project with dubious success producing immense cost for its day.

Despite disputes between the Army and Navy for who would pay these immense costs, preparations continued.¹⁵ The gunboats were to be one hundred and seventy-five feet long and fifty-five feet wide.¹⁶ They would have a draft of no more than four feet and the ironclads would be plated with sheets of iron two and a half inches thick and twelve to twenty-one inches wide joined with interlocking grooves.¹⁷ The whole project was expected to be completed in six to eight weeks. However, constructing the timber and iron warriors would be harder than first imagined. These gunboats were on the cutting edge of naval warfare, and new technologies meant trial and error. The boats were originally contracted to have two large staterooms for senior officers, ten smaller staterooms for junior officers, and two eight by ten foot mess decks for the enlisted men. As work got under way, however, the contractors quickly realized there simply was not enough room on the boats to fit everything. Instead of twelve total staterooms, the *Conestoga* could only be outfitted with eight rooms, each six foot square.¹⁸ Problems continued when it came time to arm the boats. Contractors found load-bearing beams where guns were supposed to go and

¹⁴ William Roberts, *Civil War Ironclads: The U.S. Navy and Industrial Mobilization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 19-20.

¹⁵ *ORN* 22:284-286.

¹⁶ "The New Gunboats," *Daily Picayune*, June 27, 1861.

¹⁷ "Iron Plating," Rodgers Family Papers.

¹⁸ *ORN* 22:290-291.

had to find ways of working all the guns in without compromising the structure.¹⁹ Lt. Seth L. Phelps, who would eventually command one of the gunships, was seriously concerned about the work being done; he reported the joiner work was sloppy and expressed doubts about their success.²⁰

Recruiting had been going on since the end of June, but Rodgers found considerable difficulty in getting men to enlist. This new project was uncertain from the start; no one knew yet how effective these boats would be in repelling enemy fire. Rodgers acknowledged that “the boilers and engines cannot be defended against cannon shot. We must take our chances.”²¹ No one knew exactly what would happen if a boiler was hit, and perhaps this danger kept men from enlisting.²² As the months went on, Rodgers desperately requested that Gideon Wells send him men, but none were to be had. Rodgers was forced to make do out in the west.²³ The result was that the Western Gunboat Flotilla was crewed by a peculiar conglomeration of men who did not fit in anywhere else. Army transfers (or those who did not perform well in the infantry), rough riverboat pilots, and eventually former slaves and contrabands crewed the Mississippi gunboats.²⁴ The crews were brash and undisciplined, brawling in the streets, some even dying of alcohol poisoning before shipping out.²⁵ Lt.

¹⁹ ORN 22:290-291.

²⁰ ORN 22:292.

²¹ ORN 22: 283.

²² Michael Bennett, *Union Jacks: Yankee Sailors in the Civil War* ed. Gary Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 79.

²³ Letter from Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells to Capt. John Rodgers August 23, 1861.

²⁴ Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 80.

²⁵ Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 80.

Phelps again expressed his concern, telling Rodgers that he was displeased with the quality of the pilots.²⁶

Uncertainties also arose over the time it took to complete the ironclads. The date by which the ironclads were to be completed came and went, and although unprecedented funds had been spent, it seemed there was never enough money or time to finally complete them. As Rodgers grew more and more impatient with the situation in the Cairo, St. Louis, and Mound City shipyards, Eads continued to assure him that it was only a matter of time until the ironclads were in the rivers. Finally, on November 19, 1861, Eads declared the ironclads ready for service. The names of the six were *Mound City*, *St. Louis*, *Pittsburg*, *Cincinnati*, *Benton*, and *Carondelet*.²⁷ In addition to these six, another vessel, the *New Era*, was converted to an ironclad and renamed the *Essex*.²⁸

Once completed, the ironclads were anything but sleek and glamorous weapons of war. Squat and peculiar looking, they quickly gained the nickname “Pook’s Turtles”²⁹ for their resemblance to the animal. Cramped, noisy, and dirty are words that suited the ironclads well. The only way to get to the pilot house was through two round ladders and very small port holes that only “active men”³⁰ could fit through. The steam-powered engines worked around the clock causing constant rattling and noise. The vessels burned up to six thousand pounds of coal per day and belched black smoke, covering the vessels with a thick layer of black grime.³¹ Inside the ironclads, average

²⁶ ORN 22:293.

²⁷ ORN 22:387.

²⁸ Joiner, *Brownwater Navy*, 27.

²⁹ Joiner, *Brownwater Navy*, 21.

³⁰ ORN 22:290.

³¹ Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 82-83.

temperatures hovered around ninety degrees but would swell above one hundred on hot days, earning them another nickname, the “federal bake ovens.”³²

The Western Gunboat Flotilla was born amidst a storm of doubt and obstacle. In August and September of 1861, however, the storm began to abate. The completed timberclads arrived in Cairo, Illinois on August 16 and immediately were ordered to “make a demonstration down the River towards New Madrid.”³³ As the boats began to operate, newspapers across the North began to sing the praises of the new gun boats. The *North American & United States Gazette* reported on September 26 that the gunboats were “floating and formidable shape...impervious to point blank shots—a ball striking them horizontally will glance off like a hailstone from a steep roof.”³⁴ Two days later, the *Daily National Intelligencer* claimed that a test shot fired at one hundred yards did no damage to the iron and that instead, the ball itself broke in pieces.³⁵ It is doubtful that a solid shot actually did break into pieces, but these reports had considerable psychological effects on soldiers and civilians alike.

Newspapers convinced Northern citizens they had an impenetrable weapon. They promised that “If the new gunboats now building near St. Louis, prove to be as invulnerable as expected, they will be one of the most effective...in whipping the rebellion. She can’t be sunk,

³² Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 82.

³³ Report from Capt. S.L. Phelps to Captain John Rodgers August 16, 1861, Rodgers Family Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁴ *North American and United States Gazette*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) Thursday, September 26, 1861; Issue 25; col. I.

³⁵ “Western Gunboats,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, (Washington, D.C.) Saturday, September 28, 1861; Issue 15, 329; col. C.

burned, nor blown up.”³⁶ The reporter was referring the *New Era*, later renamed the *Essex*. W.B. Coleman, acting Paymaster of the *Tyler*, wrote in late September, “It is astonishing what a change...has brought about in Public Opinion in regard to these Gun Boats, they are positively quoted now as the safety guards...”³⁷ These praises only got louder as the boats continued to perform. On November 7, 1861, General Ulysses Grant decided to try to take Belmont, just across the river from the Confederate stronghold at Columbus, Kentucky. Belmont proved too strong, however, and he was forced to withdraw. During the retreat, the *Lexington* and *Tyler* were able to put up a strong enough cover fire to allow all of Grant’s forces to evacuate. Both Grant and the naval captains recognized that the gunboats had served a valuable purpose; had it not been for the well-directed cover fire, Grant’s men probably would not have been able to pull out successfully.³⁸ Belmont impacted Grant profoundly; there he learned the importance of joint army-navy maneuvers that would characterize the rest of his fighting in the west.³⁹

Reports from the gunboat captains took on a more hopeful tone after Belmont and even more so throughout December and January of 1861-62. Earlier that fall, Rodgers was replaced by Flag Officer Andrew Hull Foote for disagreeing with Major General John C. Fremont, but he left behind the beginnings of a fleet “worth more than

³⁶ *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, (Bangor, Maine) Saturday, November 16, 1861; Issue 118; col. A.

³⁷ W.B. Coleman, Acting Paymaster *U.S.S. Tyler*, September 29, 1861, Rodgers Family Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁸ Captain Walke, Report on the Battle of Belmont, August 9, 1861, Rodgers Family Papers, Library of Congress; *ORN* 22:302.

³⁹ U.S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1885), 279-280; Joiner, *Brownwater Navy*, 36

5,000 soldiers.”⁴⁰ The western crewmen were performing well and proving that they could make good artillerymen after all. Many were impressed by the boats’ ability to withstand heavy fire. Phelps’ report after the Battle of Lucas Bend was incredibly positive, reporting inflicting damage and receiving little in return.⁴¹

As the new gunboats commenced patrolling the rivers, Confederate horrors were only beginning. The rivers in the south cut straight to the core of the Confederacy, and the shallow gunboats were able to penetrate deeply into enemy territory with relative ease. This caused devastating psychological effects on Confederate citizens and soldiers alike. Appearing without warning, the gunboats represented a piercing type of invasion. Unlike the land armies, gunboats were incredibly mobile, seeming to materialize out of thin air and cause absolute terror in Confederate sympathizers. Images of vile Yankee gunboats preying on towns of old men and women supported the myth of the Vandal Yankee and infuriated Southern soldiers who could not effectively defend against them.⁴² The *North American & United States Gazette* reproduced a section of the *Richmond Examiner* on September 2 expressing relief that the South had finally started work on their own gunboats to combat Yankees “prowling through our rivers and hovering about our harbors.”⁴³ Commander Strembel of the

⁴⁰ ORN 22:319.

⁴¹ ORN 22:324-325.

⁴² John Beauchamp Jones, “Diary of John Beauchamp Jones, February 1862,” in *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary At the Confederate States Capital*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1866), 110. accessed via The American Civil War: Letters and Diaries Database; Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 85-86.

⁴³ “Southern Gunboats,” *North American and United States Gazette*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) Monday, September 2, 1861; Issue 25, 850; col. G.

Cincinnati claimed that two shots from the ironclad sent Confederate troops fleeing eight miles from the river.⁴⁴

The Mississippi Gunboat Flotilla entered the Fort Henry and Donelson campaign as a weapon of terror. Although they had not yet fought a significant battle, both sides believed the ironclads to be impenetrable and undefeatable. For the North, this caused joy and confidence; for the South, fear and helplessness reigned. By early 1862, Grant had decided to attempt joint maneuvers to push up the Tennessee River and attained permission from Major General Henry Halleck to do so on February 1, 1862. Halleck, unsure of the success of such a mission, carefully crafted his orders so that if the mission should fail, all of the blame would fall on Grant.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, Grant moved forward with his plans. Fort Henry sat low on the Tennessee River in a poorly chosen spot. It did not help matters any that in his frenzied attempt to turn Columbus into the ‘Gibraltar’ of the West, Major General Leonidas Polk had diverted resources for the fort’s defense to Columbus. The result was an unfinished and sloppily built fort that could be enfiladed by three or four points on the opposite shore.⁴⁶ Manned by 2,610 men, only a third of which were disciplined and properly trained, the fort was in bad shape by early 1862.⁴⁷ Most of the men were armed with shotguns and hunting rifles, and one of the better armed regiments, the 10th Tennessee, was using “Tower of London” flintlock muskets that had last seen action in the War of 1812.⁴⁸ As early as February 4,

⁴⁴ *ORN* 22: 300.

⁴⁵ Joiner, *Brownwater Navy*, 39.

⁴⁶ *ORN* 22:556.

⁴⁷ *ORN* 22:557.

⁴⁸ Jesse Taylor, “Memoir of Jesse Taylor”, in *The Civil War Series Volume 1: Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: Century

soldiers inside the fort could see “as far as the eye could see, the course of the river could be traced by the dense volumes of smoke issuing from the flotilla.”⁴⁹ The soldiers in the fort knew attack was imminent.

In early February, 1862, Grant issued Field Orders No. 1 outlining the plan for the attack. The first division under Major General John McClelland was to occupy the road between Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, twelve miles away on the Cumberland River, to cut off the escape route and prevent reinforcements to Fort Henry. Meanwhile, two brigades under Major General C. F. Smith were to move up the west bank of the Tennessee while the Third Brigade, Second Division advanced up the east bank. One company of the Second Division was detailed to Flag Officer Foote to serve as sharpshooters on the gunboats, who would approach the fort straight on and engage.⁵⁰

At 10:20pm on February 6, the ironclads *Cincinnati*, *Carondelet*, *St. Louis*, and *Essex* approached Fort Henry four abreast. Behind them, the three timberclad gunboats formed a second line. Fire opened at 1,700 yards and steadily advanced to within 600 yards.⁵¹ Within the fort, Confederate General Lloyd Tilghman knew his force could not drive back the gunboats and made the choice to send most of his force to Fort Donelson, a much more defensible position. Tilghman retained only the heavy artillery to perform delay tactics until the bulk of his force

Co., 1887), 370. Accessed via The American Civil War: Letters and Diaries Database.

⁴⁹ Taylor, *Memoir*, 369.

⁵⁰ General U.S. Grant, Field Orders No. 1, Rodgers Family Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵¹ *ORN 22:537*; H.W. Wilson, *Ironclads In Action: A Sketch of Naval Warfare from 1855 to 1895*, Volume 1 (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1896), 62. Accessed via GoogleBooks.

could reach Donelson. In his after-action report, Tilghman estimated that the enemy gunboats had about fifty-four guns as opposed to the eleven in the fort.⁵² Tilghman managed to hold on until approximately 2:00 p.m.⁵³

Tilghman's report rings with language of desperation and hopelessness. After sending the bulk of his force to Donelson, Tilghman was faced with the choice of leaving his men or staying with them. Ultimately, he recognized what a psychological blow it would be to his men to abandon them. He decided to fight and stay, although his language makes clear that he had no hope of successfully fending off the ironclads. First, his twenty-four pounder gun exploded, killing or disabling every man at the piece. Next, the vent of his ten-inch Columbiad clogged and refused to reopen. One by one, he recorded the loss of each gun with growing anxiety. After firing for close to three hours, his men were exhausted. General Tilghman himself stepped in for an exhausted gunner at one of the thirty-two pounders.⁵⁴

Reading Tilghman's report leaves the one with the impression even the best gunmen the Confederacy could not oppose Yankee technology. Even if this is not accurate, the report is still a fascinating example of the Confederate dread of ironclads. One observer commented on the devastating effect the ironclads had on Confederate soldiers' morale: "Our artillerists became very much discouraged when they saw the two heavy guns disabled, the enemy's boats apparently uninjured and still drawing nearer and nearer. Some of them even ceased to work the 32-pounder guns, under the belief that such shot were too

⁵² *ORN* 22:557.

⁵³ *ORN* 22:559.

⁵⁴ *ORN* 22:557-559.

light to produce any effect upon the ironclad sides of the enemy's boats."⁵⁵ After the fort had surrendered, a captured Confederate gunner told a Federal sailor the *Carondelet* was the object of hatred and frustration among the gunners who, despite their well-aimed fire, could not disable her.⁵⁶ These incidents give the reader an image nearing futility; despite well-aimed Confederate fire, the ironclads just kept coming. Confederate accounts reveal the classic man versus machine dichotomy and give insight into the deeper psychological issues surrounding ironclads.

All told, the ironclads survived their baptism of fire quite well. The *Carondelet* and the *St. Louis* took six and seven hits respectively but reported no casualties. The *Cincinnati* took thirty one hits but reported only one killed and nine wounded. The *Essex* took fifteen hits, the last one piercing the boiler.⁵⁷ In addition to the Confederate soldiers, the psychological impact of the gunboats on the Federal sailors who served in them cannot be overlooked. Believing the newspapers, many gunboatmen went into battle with a false sense of safety because they believed their gunboats were impenetrable.⁵⁸ However, they were quickly disabused of these notions. Before an engagement, buckets of water and sand would be brought up to the deck. The water was for men to drink during combat; the sand was to absorb the blood. Seeing the sand forced men to confront their fears and the possibility of their injuries or deaths.⁵⁹ The combination of smoke from the engines and guns resulted in smoke so dark and thick that sometimes a man could not see the man working the gun next to him.

⁵⁵ ORN 22:604.

⁵⁶ ORN 22:545.

⁵⁷ ORN 22:539.

⁵⁸ Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 183-184.

⁵⁹ Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 185.

The darkness and almost suffocating effect of the smoke was disorienting and made men vulnerable to panic and the heat was so intense often men would strip to the waist and sweat so profusely they related it to rain.⁶⁰

Unlike a land battlefield, inside an ironclad, there was nowhere to go to escape the carnage short of jumping into the river. The plating on the gunboats negated the impact of musket fire; instead, men saw the impact of large guns, ripping holes and sending splinters of wood and other debris into the crew and inflicting horrifying, gaping wounds. Men fought amidst the blood, limbs, and all other horrors that covered the decks.⁶¹ For Federal gunboatmen, combat became a waiting game. Some men found themselves counting the number of times shots hit certain areas of the boat, waiting for one to penetrate.⁶² Although safe for a moment, at any time a shot could hit just the right spot and turn the boat into a floating death trap.

The *Essex* exemplifies how one well-placed shot could turn a gunboat into a nightmare. The officers and designers knew the gunboats were weak around the boilers and engines, but there was little that could be done.⁶³ The worst sound that could be heard on a gunboat in the Mississippi River was the sound of a shot hitting the boiler, a sharp crack followed by an intense rushing sound as scalding hot steam exploded in every direction. Steam from a boiler seared and boiled flesh and could even knock out teeth.⁶⁴ When the shot entered the *Essex*, it decapitated Acting Master's Mate S. B. Brittan before striking the boiler. Both pilots were immediately scalded to death and

⁶⁰ Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 196.

⁶¹ Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 189-190.

⁶² Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 188.

⁶³ *ORN*, 22:282-283.

⁶⁴ Bennett, *Union Jacks*, 192.

almost thirty men were soon after “writhing in agony”⁶⁵ on the deck. Only about half of the wounded would recover.⁶⁶ Captain Porter dove through a gun port to escape the steam and was caught by Seaman John Walker, who held onto him with one arm and the boat with the other until help arrived.⁶⁷ The men on the *Essex* saw comrades literally boiled to death and from inside the fort Confederate Captain Jesse Taylor could see men throwing themselves “wildly” into the water to escape the steam.⁶⁸

After the fort fell, the timberclads *Lexington* and *Conestoga* were sent upriver to pursue any Confederate vessels they came across. They overcame eight Confederate vessels whose crews were forced to set them on fire before they could be captured by Union sailors. Included in the destruction was a load of iron destined for the Tredgar Iron Works and the destruction of over \$100,000 of Confederate government property. At Florence and Tuscumbia, Federal troops broke into Confederate government warehouses and helped themselves to provisions but left civilian property alone.⁶⁹ Southern sympathizers reacted to the loss in horror. The new Federal gunboats seemed invincible. The fight was relayed by the *Daily Columbus Enquirer* as an almost completely one-sided affair. “The fall of the first-named fort[Henry], we have no doubt, is due to the superiority of the guns of the Yankees—their gunboats, we presume, standing off, as at Hatteras, beyond the effective range of

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Ironclads in Action*, 63.

⁶⁶ Wilson, *Ironclads in Action*, 63.

⁶⁷ Jay Slagle, *Ironclad Captain: Seth Ledyard Phelps and the U.S. Navy, 1841-1864* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1996), 160.

⁶⁸ Taylor, “Memoir of Jesse Taylor,” 372.

⁶⁹ “Federal Invasion-Gunboats Destroyed-Return of the Gunboats,” *Daily Columbus Enquirer* (Columbus, Georgia) February 15, 1862; Vol. 4, Issue 63, 3.

the guns of the fort, and at this safe distance pouring into it a fire which ultimately compelled its surrender or evacuation.”⁷⁰ John Beauchamp Jones, a Confederate clerk, spun the invasion upriver as an attack on helpless, despairing women. As the boats continued their upriver raid, Confederates became terrified that the gunboats would be able to get into Alabama and Mississippi.⁷¹

For others, however, the gunboats had an interesting way of sorting out sympathies. Captain Phelps reported Unionists suddenly appearing on the river banks, telling stories of forced conscription, appealing to the gunboats as their liberators and begging them to stay. Often, the sight of gunboats would embolden Unionist citizens to unmask their sympathies, tearing apart the notion of the solid South. Phelps also reported that at least twenty-five young men clambered to the ironclads to enlist in the Union Army.⁷² Once the gunboats departed, however, many of those same citizens hid those convictions because the gunboats were no longer there to protect them.⁷³ The morale boost in the North was astounding. Flag Officer Foote was praised for his action and when the *Cincinnati* steamed into Cairo with Fort Henry’s Stars and Bars flying upside down under the United States flag, the city erupted into joyous cheering.⁷⁴ Some declared that the war would soon be over, but Flag

⁷⁰ ““The Situation” in Kentucky,” *Daily Columbus Enquirer* (Columbus, Georgia) February 10, 1862; Vol. 4, Issue 58, 2; Slagle, *Ironclad Captain*, 163-165, 167.

⁷¹ Jones, *Diary of a Rebel War Clerk*, 110.

⁷² Benjamin F. Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson: The Key to the Confederate Heartland* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 114.

⁷³ Slagle, *Ironclad Captain*, 170, 172.

⁷⁴ Myron Smith, *The U.S.S. Carondelet: A Civil War Ironclad on Western Waters* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), 68; Slagle, *Ironclad Captain*, 175.

Officer Foote mourned the losses on the *Essex* and vowed that “never again will I go into a fight half-prepared.”⁷⁵

The victory at Fort Henry was much more important for its psychological effect than for its actual military achievements. Although at first glance it appears that the ironclads were able to pull off a stunning, single-handed victory, two key factors worked hugely to their advantage. First, the horrible positioning of the fort beneath the water line resulted in flooding and allowed the ironclads to pour direct fire into it. Secondly, the bulk force of the garrison had already been sent ahead to Fort Donelson and only a skeleton force remained behind to cover the retreat. These factors produced a skewed vision of the ironclads as invincible weapons of war.⁷⁶ The *Macon Daily Telegraph* glumly reported on the hard losses of the fort and the timberclad raid, misreporting that there was only one Federal casualty from the battle.⁷⁷

The same newspaper, however, sought to minimize fear of the ironclads. One week after reporting on the hard losses, the *Macon Daily Telegraph* ran an article titled “Federal Gunboats Not Invulnerable.” The article misreported that the Confederates had been able to inflict one hundred Federal casualties and assured its readers that at least two shots had been able to penetrate the iron on the *Essex* and the *Cincinnati*. The article went on to predict that if the ironclads were to attack a better equipped, stronger fort, the outcome would be different.⁷⁸ The article ran on

⁷⁵ Andrew Hull Foote, as quoted in Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 110.

⁷⁶ Milligan, “From Theory to Application,” 129.

⁷⁷ “From Tennessee,” *Macon Daily Telegraph* (Macon, Georgia) February 13, 1862, Issue 630, 1.

⁷⁸ “The Federal Gunboats Not Invulnerable,” *Macon Daily Telegraph* (Macon, Georgia) February 19, 1862, Issue 635, 2.

February 19, two days after Fort Donelson fell, but Donelson is never mentioned in the article and the prediction seems almost prophetic.

Meanwhile, preparations were being made inside Fort Donelson for the coming attack. Reporting on the state of Donelson's defenses, Chief Engineer Lt. Colonel Gilmer felt confident in the fort's ability to withstand a land attack but remained concerned about the gunboats.⁷⁹ Brigadier General John Floyd, the commander officer of the fort, echoed similar sentiments. Floyd betrayed his anxiety, saying, "If the best information I can gather about these iron-clad boats be true they are nearly invulnerable, and therefore they can probably go wherever sufficient fuel and depth of water can be found, unless met by opposing gunboats."⁸⁰ Instead of waiting for orders, Grant capitalized on the opportunity and started immediately for Fort Donelson. Because the ironclads had performed so well at Fort Henry, Grant allowed them to attack without infantry support.⁸¹ This would prove to be a mistake. Donelson was much better outfitted, manned by about thirteen thousand troops, and sat on one hundred and twenty foot bluffs, starkly different from the lowlands of Fort Henry.⁸² On February 14, the ironclad assault was to begin in earnest. This was not the same fleet that had taken on Fort Henry; both the *Essex* and the *Cincinnati* were out for repairs. This time, the *Louisville* and the *Pittsburg* would join the *Carondelet* and the *St. Louis* along with the

⁷⁹ *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 1, 7: 608, hereafter cited *ORA*.

⁸⁰ *ORA* 1, 7: 865.

⁸¹ Milligan, "From Theory to Application", 129; Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 149.

⁸² Joiner, *Brownwater Navy*, 41.

timberclads *Tyler* and *Conestoga*.⁸³ Foote himself was still not confident after the *Essex* boiler explosion and did not feel the Flotilla was ready to go into action again. Grant, however, disagreed, confident in their ability to deliver him another quick victory.⁸⁴ The night before the assault, the two men met to discuss their disagreement. Although much of the conversation has been lost, Grant emerged cheerful and sure of his impending victory.⁸⁵

On the morning of the assault, Grant and his staff assembled to watch the spectacular ironclads at work. Freezing rain and snow had reduced visibility to only a few yards.⁸⁶ In order to prevent another *Essex*, the crew of the *Pittsburg* had stacked bags of coal, hammocks, and any other materials they could find around the boiler to protect it from direct fire.⁸⁷ As the ironclads steamed up to the fort with the timberclads in support, Confederate gunners managed to hold their fire until the ironclads got within a range of about four hundred yards and let loose a hail of fire simultaneously.⁸⁸ Very quickly, chaos broke out as the *Carondelet* started the assault by sending harassing fire into the water batteries.

Instead of demolishing the batteries, the Confederate gunners were instead able to inflict serious damage to the point where some believed they had sunk *Carondelet* after she drifted downriver.⁸⁹ The *Carondelet* had one of its rifled guns explode and was struck in the

⁸³ *ORN*, 22:585; James Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1968), 132-133.

⁸⁴ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 302.

⁸⁵ Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 153.

⁸⁶ *ORA* 1, 7:174.

⁸⁷ *ORN* 22:592.

⁸⁸ *ORN* 22:606.

⁸⁹ *ORA*, 1, 7: 281.

wheelhouse, jamming the wheel and rendering the ironclad useless as she floated back down the river in need of extensive repairs.⁹⁰ The official after action battle reported also noted that the *Pittsburg* had struck off his starboard rudder and the *Tyler* accidentally hit his casemate with a shell. The *Carondelet* reported no injuries after Henry, but after Donelson the crew had suffered forty-six wounded and four killed.⁹¹

The *St. Louis* also suffered, taking a shot through the pilothouse that penetrated one and a half inches of iron and more than fifteen inches of oak timber.⁹² Splinters from the timber wounded several, including Flag Officer Foote, who suffered an injury to the ankle.⁹³ As the ironclads got closer, the fort's batteries were able to fire directly onto their decks. Iron-plating on the decks was not very thick and the gunboats were mauled as shots penetrated the deck and wreaked havoc below. After only ninety minutes of firing, the ironclads were forced to retreat. The *Carondelet* alone sent one hundred and thirty-nine shells into the fort with minimal damage. Not a single Confederate gun in the fort was disabled and not one casualty was reported.⁹⁴

The morale of the Confederate soldiers soared. After blowing off the smokestack of the *St. Louis*, one Rebel gunner reportedly shrieked out, "Come on, you cowardly scoundrels, you are not at Fort Henry!"⁹⁵ Brigadier General Gideon Pillow sent joyous telegrams declaring their success in the "fiercest fight on record" with

⁹⁰ ORN 22:591.

⁹¹ ORN 22:591.

⁹² ORN 22:585; Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 157.

⁹³ ORN 22:587; Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 303.

⁹⁴ Miligan, "From Theory to Application," 129.

⁹⁵ Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 157.

the ironclads.⁹⁶ A portion of the diary of Captain R.R. Ross, a commander of one of the shore batteries, reproduced in the *Confederate Veteran* in 1896, wrote that driving back the ironclads was in itself a great victory. Ross made it a point to show that the ironclads had failed and been soundly defeated.⁹⁷

The failure of the ironclads disappointed Grant, who wrote in his memoirs that though at first the enemy had been demoralized by the assault, after seeing them driven off, their “jubilant” response made him sad. He planned to pull back and entrench until the flotilla could get the necessary repairs in Cairo.⁹⁸ General Floyd, however, had different ideas. On the night of the 14th, Floyd attempted a desperate breakout attempt, hitting the Union right. The Federals were able to hold their line but at the loss of an estimated 1,200 casualties. The next day, Grant ordered Major General C. F. Smith’s Division to charge the enemy’s right and then ordered a second assault by Major Generals John McClelland and Lew Wallace to commence on the enemy’s left.⁹⁹

After the catastrophe of the ironclad assault, a demoralized and injured Foote had regrouped his flotilla downriver and was ready to drift back to Cairo for repairs. Grant, however, ordered any gunboats able should return to the fort and fire shells at a distance. Grant wrote that if the gunboats simply made an appearance during McClelland and Wallace’s attack, their presence alone could shift morale, save the reputation of the ironclads, and secure victory. When Commander Benjamin Dove, temporarily in

⁹⁶ *ORN* 22:612.

⁹⁷ *Confederate Veteran*, Volume 4, 1896, 393. Digitized by Duke University.

⁹⁸ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 303-305.

⁹⁹ *ORA* 1, 7:159.

command since Foote's injury, received the message, he perceived its importance and immediately took the *St. Louis*, the only ironclad left in an operable condition and returned to fire on the fort.¹⁰⁰ That night, Brigadier General John Floyd, Pillow, and Nathan Bedford Forrest all broke out of the fort to avoid capture, leaving Simon Bolivar Buckner to surrender and sent a message to Grant requesting certain terms.¹⁰¹ Grant, however, replied with the now-famous phrase, "no terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted," forever earning himself the nickname "Unconditional Surrender Grant."¹⁰²

The descriptions of the ironclads after the Fort Henry and Donelson Campaign are perhaps the most interesting of all the documents analyzed. On paper, the ironclads were embarrassed, destroyed, proven to be vulnerable and able to be beaten. That, however, is not the story that emerged from the aftermath reports and recollections. Instead, if anything, the reputation of the ironclads only became more invincible as time passed and memories began to form. General Lew Wallace later recollected after receiving devastating news that all of the ironclads had been disabled, he was overjoyed to hear the sound of their guns just as his men were about to assault the Rebel line. Wallace said, "While my division was engaged, the guns of the fleet opened fire again. I recollect yet the positive pleasure the sounds gave me. I recollect thinking, too, of the obstinacy and courage of the commodore, and how well timed his attack was, if, as I made no doubt, it

¹⁰⁰ *The Papers of U.S. Grant*, Volume 4: January 8-March 31, 1862, ed. John Simon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 214. Digitized by Mississippi State University.

¹⁰¹ *ORA* 1, 7:281,284.

¹⁰² Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 311

was made to assist General Smith and myself...”¹⁰³ Returning to fire saved the “reputation for invincibility in the minds of both the national and rebel armies.”¹⁰⁴

In these statements, Wallace helped to create and essential myth to the legacy of the Western Gunboat Flotilla. The Fort Henry and Donelson campaign is not remembered as a thrashing of the ironclads but instead as the triumph of Grant’s audacity and cutting edge technology. John Milligan has made the point that although Donelson proved the ironclads were not invincible, it did not matter; the psychological damage had already been done and the myth had been created.¹⁰⁵ In his *Memoirs of Service Afloat*, Ralph Semmes treated the events of February 1862 as a foregone conclusion, writing: “When the enemy, by means of his gunboats, could send armies up the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers, to the heart of Tennessee and Alabama, it was folly to think of holding Bowling Green, with our limited forces.”¹⁰⁶

Analyzing the Western Gunboat Flotilla’s performance and legacy during the Fort Henry and Donelson campaign yields interesting insight into both Union and Confederate reactions to the advent of ironclad warfare. Born out of uncertainty and doubt, the ironclads became a symbol of the invincibility of Yankee industry, even when that notion was proven false at Fort Donelson. Gunboat technology was still in its infancy in the early days of 1862 and yet, despite the trial and error, the ironclads loomed larger than life. For some, such as Lew Wallace’s infantrymen, this symbol produced inspiration and pride.

¹⁰³ ORN 22:589.

¹⁰⁴ ORN 22:590.

¹⁰⁵ Milligan, “From Theory to Application,” 129-130.

¹⁰⁶ Ralph Semmes, *Memoirs of Service Afloat* (Secaucus: The Blue & Grey Press, 1987), 362.

For others, such as John Beauchamp Jones and Ralph Semmes, the ironclads came to represent industrialized Yankee villainy. The thrills and fears the ironclads on the Fort Henry and Donelson campaign inspired are far more essential to the understanding of ironclad legacy and memory today than their actual performance in the field.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Boston Daily Advertiser, Boston, MA.

Daily Columbus Enquirer, Columbus, Georgia.

Daily National Intelligencer, Washington, D.C.

Grant, U.S. *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*. New York, Charles L. Webster & Company. 1885.

Jones, John Beauchamp. *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary at the Confederate States Capital*. Vol. 1. Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott & Co. 1866. Accessed via The American Civil War: Letters and Diaries Database.

Macon Daily Telegraph, Macon, Georgia.

North American and United States Gazette
Philadelphia, PA.

Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion

Rodgers Family Papers, Library of Congress.

Semmes, Ralph. *Memoirs of Service Afloat*. Secaucus: The Blue & Grey Press, 1987.

Taylor, Jesse. "Memoir of Jesse Taylor," in *The Civil War Series Volume 1: Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. New York: Century Co. 1887. Accessed via The American Civil War: Letters and Diaries Database.

The Daily Picayune, New Orleans, LA.

The Papers of U.S. Grant. Volume 4: January 4-March 31, 1862. Edited by John Simon. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 1972.

War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies

Secondary Sources

Bennett, Michael. *Union Jacks: Yankee Sailors in the Civil War*. Edited by Gary Gallagher. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2004.

Cooling, Benjamin F. *Forts Henry and Donelson: The Key to the Confederate Heartland*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press. 1987.

Garrison, Evan. "Three Ironclad Warships—The Archaeology of Industrial Process and Historical Myth." *Historical Archaeology* 29, no. 4 (1995), 26-38.

Hamilton, James. *The Battle of Fort Donelson*. New York: Thomas Yoseloff. 1968.

Johnson

Joiner, Gary. "Soul Stirring Music to Our Ears: Gunboats at Shiloh." In *The Shiloh Campaign*, edited by Steven Woodworth. 96-109. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 2009.

_____. *Mr. Lincoln's Brownwater Navy: The Mississippi Squadron*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2007.

Milligan, John. "From Theory to Application: The Emergence of the American Ironclad War Vessel." *Military Affairs* 48, no. 3 (July, 1984), 126-132.

Roberts, William. *Civil War Ironclads: The U.S. Navy and Industrial Mobilization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2002.

Slagle, Jay. *Ironclad Captain: Seth Ledyard Phelps and the U.S. Navy, 1841-1864*. Kent: Kent State University Press. 1996.

Smith, Myron. *The U.S.S. Carondelet: A Civil War Ironclad on Western Waters*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company. 2010.

Wilson, H. W. *Ironclads in Action: A Sketch of Naval Warfare from 1855 to 1895*. Volume 1. London: Sampson Low, Marston, and Company. 1896. Accessed via GoogleBooks.

The Memory of Battle Surrounds You Once Again: Iowa Grand Army of the Republic Reunions and the Formation of a Pro-Union Nationalism, 1886-1949

Peter Bautz

Five years after the Civil War ended, Secretary of War William Belknap delivered a keynote address before a group of veterans at the 1870 Reunion of the Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.). A former Major General in the Union Army and a fellow Iowan, he began his address by invoking the memory of the war that had recently ended: “In the joyous satisfaction of a Union rescued and under the control of peace, you are, in imagination, my brothers, in the midst of an Army of which you were a part. You are among memories which no influences can now dispel.” Belknap then spoke about memories of muskets firing, friends falling, and the triumph of patriotism. He memorialized valorous Iowans who had given their last for their country and reminded the living to honor their sacrifice as Lincoln had asked in the Gettysburg Address.¹

Belknap concluded his address with another strong reminder about the role of Civil War memory in American society. He told the veterans, “History will tell of the deeds of those days. Artists will sketch in colors the memorable actions which will to all ages illustrate the art and science of war. Songs will recount the heroic labors of the Union’s brave; but soon of those whom the Nation honored there will be only a memory left.” He then reminded veterans

¹ William Belknap, “Address of General Wm. W. Belknap Secretary of War at the Re-union of Iowa Soldiers, Des Moines, Iowa,” August 31, 1870, 3-4.

that the duty of reminding the nation about what memory should be preserved would fall to them as they aged: “[The memory of the war], though, will still endure, and as the last actors in those scenes, with trembling limbs and silvered locks, are singled out as survivors of a patriotic Army ... children will hasten to gather around them as they tell the stories of the days of the great rebellion.” Belknap had, in short, instructed the Union veterans before him to pass their memories on to the next generation and to ensure that the patriotic, Union version of the war was not lost.²

Speeches like Belknap’s illustrate how powerful veterans were in shaping the memory of the Civil War. Veteran societies, like the G.A.R. and the United Confederate Veterans (U.C.V.), and their reunions buttressed and emboldened their respective section’s national myth. Public memory has become an increasingly important area of research for historians, who have begun to recognize that the creation of memory is often just as important as the events that the memory seeks to enshrine.³ Undervalued in much of the recent public memory work by historians of the Civil War has been the impact Union veterans had in shaping a pro-Union nationalism. Many historians, like Caroline Janney and John Neff, have found it difficult to pin down exactly what the pro-Union nationalism was. Janney views the nationalism as a

² William Belknap, “Address of General Wm. W. Belknap Secretary of War at the Re-union of Iowa Soldiers, Des Moines, Iowa,” August 31, 1870, 14-16.

³ Some examples from historians include: David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Sarah Purcell, *Sealed With Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

reconciliatory, umbrella one which everyone from suffragettes to imperialists could get behind.⁴ These definitions of a pro-Union nationalism have been unsatisfying at best. But perhaps this difficulty can be explained by the fact that most historians have insisted on treating the North as one monolithic group. Most works on Northern memory include veterans' memories as part of their study but fail to separate them from politicians and home front memories of the war.

Separating out veterans as a select sub-category of the Northern population allows a deeper look at what veterans thought about the war in its aftermath. It becomes clear when considered separately that veterans created and maintained a distinctly pro-Union nationalism which undercut Lost Cause claims, reminded the nation that the Union fought for the right cause and the Confederacy fought for the wrong cause, and argued for the remembrance of Union sacrifices but not Confederate sacrifice. These themes crop up in many states around the country, including Iowa. In particular, publications of the Iowa Department of the G.A.R. from its founding in 1868 to its dissolution in 1949 provide an excellent case study of how reunions played a major role in forming a pro-Union national identity.

The Grand Army of the Republic

In 1866, Major Benjamin Franklin Stephenson and Chaplain William Rutledge founded the G.A.R. in Illinois. From there, the G.A.R. grew from a small group into a large national organization which became a breeding

⁴ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 8-11. John Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 1-15.

ground for pro-Union nationalism. From its inception, the G.A.R. earned the reputation of a bloody-shirt-waving, Republican partisan organization for Union veterans.⁵ Low participation rates among veterans forced the G.A.R. to undergo a transformation into a fraternal order dedicated to a three word motto: “fraternity,” “charity,” “loyalty.”⁶ The new G.A.R. gathered a large number of veterans to the organization and by the 1880s could claim over 400,000 Union veterans among its ranks.⁷ The late 1880s also saw another shift in the G.A.R. as it became one of two Civil War veterans’ associations. The rise of the U.C.V. in the South at the end of the nineteenth century began the dissemination of the Lost Cause in opposition to the pro-Union nationalism espoused by the G.A.R.⁸ While

⁵ State Historical Society of Iowa, *The Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic* (Iowa City: Athens Press, 1936), 18-19.

⁶ Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), *xiii-xiv*.

⁷ State Historical Society of Iowa, *Iowa Department of the G.A.R.*, 20-24. In this case, “ranks” is both figurative and literal. The G.A.R. was arranged in a quasi-military structure with a Commander-in-Chief, Department Heads, Quartermasters, etc.

⁸ The U.C.V. was not the creator of the Lost Cause but the organization did help to make the Lost Cause a mainstream notion in the South. Foster Gaines notes that the Lost Cause was based on tropes: “states’ rights,” “white supremacy,” “[defending Southern] actions in 1861-1865,” and “[insisting] that the North acknowledge the honor and heroism of [the Southern] cause.” This was often a far cry from the Union nationalism found in the G.A.R. For more, see: Keith Bohannon, “‘These Few Gray-Haired, Battle-Scarred Veterans’: Confederate Army Reunions in Georgia, 1885-95,” in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, edited by Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000): 89-110; Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-8; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory* (New York:

continuing to bolster a pro-Union nationalism, the G.A.R. campaigned heavily for pension reforms and Republican political candidates. In fact, it was often thought that, through the end of the nineteenth century, a Republican candidate could not secure the party nomination for president without G.A.R. support.⁹

However, the G.A.R. provided more than simply political support and a voice in government for its members. G.A.R. departments were divided into posts, serving towns and cities of various sizes. At post buildings, veterans would gather to talk about politics, war memories, and anything else that might be in vogue.¹⁰ The G.A.R. also sponsored numerous reunions at the national, state, and local levels. These annual reunions were called “encampments” and normally involved veterans gathering to remember the war and discuss army memories with their fellow veterans over the course of a few days. Encampments involved a day of formal, official meetings and informal campfires at night. Campfires involved singing songs, reciting poetry, and listening to informal speeches – in other words, the perfect environment to facilitate the development of nationalism.¹¹

The Iowa G.A.R. was a particularly well organized state department of the G.A.R. and was active at the national level as well. The Iowa Department kept some of the best records of their reunions and was one of the largest

Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Robert E. Lee, “General Order No. 9,” April 10, 1865.

⁹ State Historical Society of Iowa, *The Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic* (Iowa City: Athens Press, 1936), 20-24.

¹⁰ McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, xiii-xiv.

¹¹ Iowa Grand Army of the Republic, *Journal of the Forty-third Annual Encampment Department of Iowa Grand Army of the Republic at Davenport* (Des Moines: J. H. Welch Printing Co., 1917).

and best organized G.A.R. state departments. Iowa provided three Commanders-in-Chief of the G.A.R. and was prominent at many reunions. Founded in 1868, the Iowa Department was the third G.A.R. department to be formed, and many national G.A.R. reunions were held in the state.¹² In short, Iowa was a major participant at all levels of G.A.R. reunions.

The Memory Debate and Imagining Communities

Scholars of Civil War memory have worked to formulate an idea of how Americans created imagined communities in the aftermath of the Civil War via shared experiences. David Blight argues that Confederate and Union veterans came together over a shared whiteness, forgetting about slavery as a cause of the Civil War in favor of a more neutral memory of soldiers' valorous sacrifice.¹³ Christopher Waldrep, likewise, argues that the North capitulated to Southern racial views, using the Blue-Grey reunion at Vicksburg in 1917 as a case study.¹⁴ Some scholars have sought to chip away at this reconciliationist position. John Neff argues that Union memorial services and memorials helped solidify a pro-Union nationalism rather than a capitulation to the Lost Cause.¹⁵ Barbara Gannon emphasizes black integration in the G.A.R., which was much more widespread than previously thought, as a primary conduit for the formation of a pro-Union

¹² State Historical Society of Iowa, *The Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic* (Iowa City: Athens Press, 1936), 28-30.

¹³ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 3-5.

¹⁴ Christopher Waldrep, *Vicksburg's Long Shadow: The Civil War Legacy of Race and Remembrance* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 1-5.

¹⁵ Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead*, 1-15.

nationalism.¹⁶ Caroline Janney directly pushes back against Blight and argues that the North never forgot that the Civil War was fought to free the slaves and that these veterans were developing a pro-America nationalism.¹⁷ In sum, there is an ongoing debate in the historical community regarding how much the North capitulated to the South over issues of memory.

All these scholars share one thing in common: a focus on memory and the development of nationalism. Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" framework for nationalism provides a useful tool in this case study for understanding how Iowa veterans were creating a pro-Union nationalism. Anderson defines a nation as imagined because "members ... will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."¹⁸ He recognizes shared songs, poems, and printed works as key to developing the imagined communities – they are the tools by which people imagine what their fellows must be like. All of these types of community-building activities occurred at reunions, making the "imagined communities" framework highly useful in evaluating Iowa G.A.R. reunions.

Another common element to these scholars' work is their treatment of the early years of the G.A.R.. None of these scholars contest the idea that the G.A.R. was a partisan Republican, pro-Union group in its early years.¹⁹

¹⁶ Barbara Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1-11.

¹⁷ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 3-11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ See for instance, Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 141-142, where Blight describes the fierce partisanship which he argues "gave way" to the

Disagreement over the level of reconciliation only arises in when historians consider the era after the Lost Cause emerged in the mid-1880s. For this reason, this study focuses on the years 1886-1949 for this study.

The Peak Years of the G.A.R.: 1886-1913

By the end of the nineteenth century, the G.A.R. had become a vast organization with hundreds of thousands of members. These members retained Republican allegiances and were responsible for getting numerous Republican candidates elected to office.²⁰ As its members aged, it became a powerhouse for securing pensions for Union veterans and establishing Soldiers' Homes for poor veterans.²¹ G.A.R. national encampments and national campfires became larger and the memories created at these events reached wider audiences as the G.A.R. became better organized and published more literature for its members.²² Here, too, Iowa mirrored larger trends in the G.A.R. as Iowa veterans helped get Republican governors, senators, and representatives elected. They voted for Republican presidential nominees. The Iowa encampment journals became longer and contained better notes, and Iowa encampments became bigger.²³

The songs, poems, and speeches at Iowa G.A.R. reunions from 1886 to 1913 demonstrate that sectionalism

reconciliation of the late 1880s onwards. The Iowa G.A.R. was just as partisan as the national G.A.R. during its early years, if not more so.

²⁰ McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, xiv-xvi.

²¹ *Ibid.*, xiv-xvi. State Historical Society of Iowa, *Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic*, 23, 37-38.

²² State Historical Society of Iowa, *Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic*, 23, 37-38.

²³ *Ibid.*, 35-40. Given the context of the definition, "perpetrate" was likely a phonetic (mis)spelling of "perpetuate." As it is, perpetrating a memory the organization cherished makes no sense.

was very much alive well into the twentieth century. When the Torrence G.A.R. Post in Keokuk, Iowa, adopted a new set of by-laws in 1891 at their annual post reunion, they included an introductory section in which they defined the three watchwords of the G.A.R.: “fraternity,” “charity,” “loyalty.”²⁴ However, it is apparent that fraternity did not mean fraternity for all veterans of the Civil War. They defined fraternity as bringing together the men who “united to suppress the late rebellion” and to “perpetrate [sic] the memory and history of the dead.”²⁵ This is hardly a definition of reconciliation. Instead, these Iowa veterans established a fraternal club that excluded ex-Confederates. The most interesting definition they gave, though, was of “loyalty”:

To maintain true allegiance to the United States of America, based upon a paramount respect for, and fidelity to, the National Constitution and Laws, to discountenance whatever tends *to weaken loyalty, incites to insurrection, treason or rebellion*, or in any manner impairs the efficiency and permanency of *our free institutions*.²⁶

Notably, the G.A.R. veterans chose to emphasize their position against treason and rebellion – two terms that were frequently used to describe Confederates even after the war by these veterans. They also chose to emphasize how they would protect their free (i.e. not slave) institutions. These

²⁴ *By Laws and Roster of Torrence Post No. 2 Grand Army of the Republic Department of Iowa* (Keokuk: No Publisher Listed, 1891), 2-3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶ *By Laws and Roster of Torrence Post No. 2*. Emphasis mine.

lines do not sound like those of an organization dedicated to “reconciliation and fraternalism” with their ex-Confederate counterparts.²⁷

Iowa G.A.R. members went beyond simply invoking sectionalist definitions of their organization at reunions, though. They also read poems with a definite pro-Union, anti-Confederacy message. At the second reunion of the 35th Iowa Infantry in 1889, Blair Wolf of Company G rose to recite a poem he had written for the occasion. He reminded his audience that when “foul rebellion arose in the land / ... / The Northland stood firm in upholding the laws.”²⁸ He argued that the Union had “stood up for justice” and “fought for the truth.”²⁹ This recitation was “heartily received” with a “storm of applause” according to the report of the reunion.³⁰ This type of poem fits well within the model Anderson presents in *Imagined Communities*. Wolf invoked the plural “we” to describe his fellow Union veterans and reminded them of the cause for which they had fought – national unity. The lines of this poem celebrate a heroic memory inseparable from the pro-Union cause.³¹ These poems were ways for veterans to partake in a shared memory of the war and to reaffirm their pro-Union nationalism.

²⁷ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 198.

²⁸ Blair Wolf, “Untitled Poem,” in *First and Second Re-unions of the Thirty-Fifth Iowa Infantry Held at Muscatine, Iowa* (Muscatine: 1890), 34. It is possible that this was John Wolf, who also served in the Thirty-Fifth Iowa. Both men were present at the reunion, and after a person spoke for the first time his name was recorded from then on as their last name preceded by the title “Comrade,” which was the title of choice for fellow G.A.R. members. Context suggests that the speaker here was Blair Wolf.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

³¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 146.

Poems such as these continued to be publicly recited at G.A.R. reunions well into the twentieth century. At the 1913 Department of Iowa encampment, Henry Field of Gordon Granger Post 64 in Grinnell rose to recite a poem about the service rendered by Union veterans written by a friend who was unable to make the reunion. The poem invoked themes of patriotism and loyalty and urged veterans to recall how they had fought to see “That the wrong might fall forever, / Neath the onward march of right.”³² This type of language was repeated often in songs, poems, and speeches at Iowa reunions and national reunions. His wording is characteristic of other similar works which praise the triumph of right over wrong, in which freedom for the slaves and restoration of the Union were on the side of the right, while treason and slavery were on the side of the wrong. By contrasting the two forces in terms of right and wrong, Iowa G.A.R. veterans created a pro-Union nationalism that rejected treason and Confederate sympathies.

Iowa veterans also sang songs intended to perpetuate the pro-Union imagined community that they had created. These songs included patriotic songs, pro-Union nationalism songs, and anti-Confederate songs. At the 1913 Iowa reunion, “Battle Cry of Freedom” was sung to wild applause as three veterans paraded across the stage wearing Union blue, carrying the Stars and Stripes, and brandishing muskets from the war. They sang “The Boys Who Wore the Blue,” which celebrates the bravery of Union soldiers under heavy fire. Other songs included patriotic, pro-America songs like “The Star Spangled

³² Pierson H. Bristow, “Retrospection,” in *Journal of Proceedings Thirty-ninth Annual Encampment Department of Iowa G.A.R.* (Des Moines: J. H. Welch Printing Co., 1913), 168-170.

Banner” and “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean.” These songs reminded veterans that they had fought for America and for a just cause. They also sang pro-Union nationalistic songs like “Up with the Flag!” and “Marching through Georgia,” which helped solidify the pro-Union nationalism of the veterans. Veterans also sang anti-South songs like “We Rose a Band of Patriots,” a rewording of the Confederate national anthem “Bonnie Blue Flag” which, among other things, changed a line about Southern rights and liberties into one about “foul treason.”³³ These songs were clearly intended to take shots at Southern views of the war by twisting pro-Confederate words to be anti-Confederate.

Yet for all the importance of songs and poems in building nationalist ideology, orations both published and spoken tell a much more explicit tale of a developing pro-Union nationalism and pushing back against the Lost Cause. Speeches also demonstrate the emerging gap between civilians’ and veterans’ memory of the war. As years passed, public officials who had not lived during the war began to reshape the memory of the war to fit a more reconciliatory tone. Veterans, however, never entirely accepted this new way of thinking about the war. At the War Department, semi-official discrimination occurred against Confederate groups during the 1890s led by the Secretary of War, Russell Alger. A former G.A.R. commander, Alger would, for instance, divert tents to G.A.R. reunions while refusing to give any to U.C.V. reunions. In the 1910s, a new Secretary of War, Lindley Garrison, who had just been born when the war ended,

³³ William Smith, *Complete G.A.R. Songbook* (Detroit: Herald Publishing House, 1887), 31.

insisted upon equal treatment for all veterans' groups.³⁴ As veterans began to leave public office, their non-veteran replacements tended to be more reconciliatory in their approach to sectionalism, as can be seen in Iowa.

In 1913, both the current governor of Iowa and a former governor of Iowa gave speeches to the annual encampment of the Iowa G.A.R. at the evening campfires. Both men had grown up during the war and were old enough to remember the fighting. George Clarke, the sitting governor who was thirteen years old when the war ended, addressed the veterans first. He invoked Lincoln's Gettysburg Address to remind veterans of the good they did in the war. He argued that the Union army had "made possible... a great destiny for the United States."³⁵ He highlighted the significance of the results: "No slavery, an indissoluble union."³⁶ Just a few hours later, ex-Governor Frank Jackson, who was eleven when the war ended, rose to address the veterans, invoking similar imagery and themes. He began by telling veterans that he, too, had been there – that he had lived through the war just as they had.

³⁴ This conclusion is drawn from careful analysis of press copies of letters sent by the Secretaries of War from 1896 to 1913. For instance, in 1897, a U.C.V. reunion was denied access to Department tents for use at their reunion under the claim that some tents had been provided for the general festival where the reunion was to occur and that the rest of the tents were needed elsewhere. Two days later, a similar request from the G.A.R. was approved and the tents which had been "unavailable" were diverted to the G.A.R. reunion instead. By 1913, the Secretary began chastising G.A.R. veterans for trying to valorize the Union too much over the Confederacy on a monument. *Press Copies of Letters Sent, War Department, 1896-1913*, record group 107, entry A1 82, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁵ George W. Clark, "Address to the Iowa Department of the G.A.R.," *Journal of the Thirty-ninth Annual Encampment*, 120.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

This created a shared space where an imagined community could be built. He then went on to talk about how the veterans had “licked the Southern Confederacy” and could still play an active role in upholding the doctrine of “human liberty” and progress as championed by the Republican party. His speech was a call to the victorious veterans to embrace the South to “reunite” the country but not failing to be watchful of the South nonetheless.³⁷

Veteran rhetoric remained pro-Union, but other civilian leaders who had not lived during the war, such as Mayor James Hanna of Des Moines, focused their speeches on sacrifice and duty, two motifs of the reconciliationist camp of Civil War memory.³⁸ Hanna began his address to the 1913 Encampment of the Iowa G.A.R. in Des Moines by calling the 1860s a “heroic age... filled with heroic issues and heroic deeds.” He went on to remind veterans of “the sacrifices and deeds of that time” which would inspire generations to come. He even went so far as to hint that the veterans were unjustly biased in their sectionalism, saying “We are sometimes too close to things to see them fully.”³⁹ Noticeably absent from Hanna’s address are any references to the triumph of the Union, Southern traitors, and the rebellion that was the war. Union veterans called the Civil War “the rebellion” or “treason;” Hanna termed it the “situation” or the “great issues of the country.”⁴⁰ He spent more time emphasizing shared sacrifice and heroism than anything else. Clearly, Hanna had bought into the idea of reconciliation.

³⁷ Frank Jackson, “Address to the Iowa Department of the G.A.R.,” *Journal of the Thirty-ninth Annual Encampment*, 139-141.

³⁸ James Hanna, “Address to the Iowa Department of the G.A.R.,” *Journal of the Thirty-ninth Annual Encampment*, 122-123.

³⁹ Hanna, “Address to the Iowa Department of the G.A.R.,” 122.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122-23.

Another good example of this civilian-veteran divide came in the form of how Iowa veterans reacted to the praise showered on the memory of Robert E. Lee by Northerners and Southerners alike on the one hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1907. When a New York magazine, *Collier's Weekly*, published an editorial valorizing Lee in 1907, Iowa veterans blasted the editorial in a pamphlet which was circulated to all G.A.R. posts around the country. *Collier's* wrote that "America has had no nobler citizen," calling Lee "grave, strong, devoted" and asking all Americans North and South to rally behind him.⁴¹ To the Iowa G.A.R. Patriotic Instructor, Robert Kissick, these eulogies were "teaching false patriotism."⁴² He laid into *Collier's* in an editorial he sent in response and in a pamphlet that was circulated to G.A.R. posts around the country. He argued that Lee had been "a traitor" and likened him to Benedict Arnold, the infamous turncoat of the Revolutionary War.⁴³ He went on to quote the responses of numerous veterans from Iowa to his article. W. D. Kinser, for instance, was disgusted that anyone would honor a traitor who fought to prop up a government founded on slavery. This pattern held true for most Iowa veterans who either criticized Lee as an uncaring traitor who backed the moral evil of slavery or sent simple letters of concurrence with Kissick's opinions.⁴⁴

As politicians and civilian publications moved towards reconciliation, veterans, like those in the Iowa G.A.R., continued to maintain a pro-Union nationalism that

⁴¹ "Robert E. Lee," *Collier's Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 17 (January 1907), quoted in Robert Kissick, *The Duty and Necessity of Teaching True American Patriotism* (Des Moines: J. H. Welch Printing Co., 1907), 9.

⁴² Kissick, *Teaching True American Patriotism*, 7.

⁴³ Kissick, *Teaching True American Patriotism*, 10-12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-19.

fought to beat back the reconciliationist views of civilians. While civilians lavished praise on Southern heroes, Iowa veterans were busy singing anti-Confederacy songs, reading poems about how Southerners were traitors, and reciting speeches about the patriotism of Union veterans.⁴⁵ Historians claim that reconciliatory rhetoric arose during this period, but records from Iowa G.A.R. encampments reveal that veterans remained sectional, sometimes strongly so, even in the twentieth century. This pattern continued even as the rest of the country tried to move beyond the sectionalism of the Civil War Era.

The G.A.R. In Decline: 1913-1956

Although most historians view the G.A.R. as a slowly declining power relegated to Memorial Day commemorations and the occasional sentimental Blue-Gray reunions after 1913, Iowa G.A.R. reunions demonstrate that veterans still actively promoted a pro-Union nationalism, albeit with slightly altered rhetoric and actions.⁴⁶ It is true that the declining population of veterans meant that grand reunions occurred less frequently. Historians are correct in arguing that the power of the national G.A.R. was on the decline. The last large national G.A.R. encampment occurred in 1922 in Iowa, and it was billed as such.⁴⁷ It was

⁴⁵ The editors at *Collier's Weekly* were just one example of this phenomenon of civilians praising Southern heroes. Theodore Roosevelt in his 1907 address in Washington, D.C. on the anniversary of Lee's birthday praised Lee as an American hero and one of America's greatest generals.

⁴⁶ McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, xvi. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 198-201. It should be noted that Blight essentially sees the G.A.R. as early as the mid-1890s.

⁴⁷ State Historical Society of Iowa, *Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic*, 25. The 1922 G.A.R. reunion in Des Moines was

at this reunion that, for the second time in the history of the G.A.R., an Iowan became Commander-in-Chief of the G.A.R.. By 1917, the Iowa G.A.R. membership had dwindled to a few thousand veterans. This did not mean the G.A.R. had lost all its power, though. Indeed, local posts such as those in Iowa continued to push for the placement of American flags in every classroom and other such patriotic activities. In other words, although the Iowa Department was in decline in terms of members, it retained considerable public influence.

The report of William Johnson, the Department of Iowa G.A.R. Patriotic Instructor, at the 1917 state reunion gives a good glimpse at the work the Iowa G.A.R. was undertaking to promote patriotism in the state. The report includes a list from the national office with responses from the Iowa Patriotic Instructor. Of note are the following details: of the forty-three posts in Iowa in 1917, thirty-six had provided over 300 American flags for placement in every school in their area, all posts ensured that a state law requiring the flag to be raised at school every day was enforced, most posts ensured that the Pledge of Allegiance was said daily in those schools, all posts ensured that “patriotic days” were observed in schools, and most posts reported on how Memorial Day was observed at schools and in towns.⁴⁸ These actions held a special significance for

billed as “The Last Great Encampment.” The last G.A.R. reunion was held in 1949 with a scant six attendees.

⁴⁸ Iowa Grand Army of the Republic, *Journal of the Forty-third Annual Encampment Department of Iowa Grand Army of the Republic at Davenport* (Des Moines: J. H. Welch Printing Co., 1917), 46-47. Of the 206 schools in the state, 160 reported to statistics to Johnson. “Patriotic Days” included Lincoln’s Birthday, Washington’s Birthday, Memorial Day, and Flag Day. The Fourth of July is conspicuously absent from the list.

the pro-Union nationalism that these veterans were trying to promote – they pushed for the Union to be celebrated in every classroom, reminding students that they were part of one nation under one flag because the Union had won the war.

The placement of flags and other pro-Union imagery was a way for local posts to solidify pro-Union nationalism even as the national G.A.R.'s power declined. Flags and national symbols play a large role in the creation of imagined communities. Anderson notes, “Out of the American welter came these imagined realities: nation-states, republican institutions, common citizenships... national flags and anthems, etc.”⁴⁹ That G.A.R. veterans were working to ensure that national flags and pledges were in schools speaks powerfully to the nation-building occurring through the G.A.R.. But it was a pro-Union nationalism that the G.A.R. was trying to foster. Alongside the flag, the Iowa G.A.R. placed copies of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address to assert to a new generation that the Union had fought to free slaves and protect the country.⁵⁰ Students would celebrate the Union Memorial Day, not the Confederate ones.⁵¹ Rather than simply being a Memorial Day organization after 1913, the G.A.R. worked feverishly to ensure that the pro-Union nationalism they had fostered among themselves would be passed on to future generations.

⁴⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 81.

⁵⁰ Iowa G.A.R., *Journal of the Forty-third Annual Encampment*, 46.

⁵¹ Confederates and many Southern states tended to celebrate a Southern Memorial Day which varied from the day Lee surrendered to Jeff Davis’ birthday. “8 Things You May Not Know About Memorial Day,” History Channel’s History in the Headlines, last modified May 24, 2013, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://www.history.com/news/8-things-you-may-not-know-about-memorial-day>

As World War I approached, veterans continued to give pro-Union speeches, but now they emphasized their status as ‘true’ patriots during the Civil War in contrast to the Confederates. For example, Colonel Palmer, one of the last surviving officers from Sherman’s staff, rose at the 1917 Iowa reunion and reminded veterans of their wartime experiences. He attacked Southerners when he announced to the men that though he had not voted for President Wilson, he would stand by him during World War I like a true patriot.⁵² On the surface this may not appear to be overly insulting, but when considered alongside Southern secession after Lincoln’s election in 1860, the true implication of Palmer’s statement becomes clear. Palmer went on to rebut claims by the Daughters of Confederate Veterans (D.C.V.) and the U.C.V. that terrible prison conditions existed in the North and South. He reminded veterans that unlike Confederates, “When we captured [Confederates] they were cared for... and cared for humanely.”⁵³ This is hardly the kind of comparison a reconciliationist would make. The constant harkening back to proud Union victories in speeches by G.A.R. members encompassed both a patriotic furor for the U.S. in World War I and a pro-Union nationalism that was meant to bolster the support of Union veterans.

In stark contrast to Palmer’s speech, William Harding, the governor of Iowa and a man who had not lived during the war, told veterans to put aside their political and sectional differences to support the war effort during the First World War and not to be concerned with the president’s Southern roots and Democratic support – only

⁵² David Palmer, “Address to the Iowa Department of the G.A.R.,” *Journal of the Forty-third Annual Encampment*, 161.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 162.

with being patriotic in the war. His emphasis on sacrifice and duty were reconciliationist.⁵⁴ Harding attempted to instill a reconciliatory joint patriotism of the sort Blight identifies.

The songs sung at the 1917 Davenport reunion that later appeared in an Iowa G.A.R. songbook in 1923 retained their pro-Union nationalist bent. One veteran sang songs about how the flag that made America free in 1776 was the same flag that freed the slave and crushed the rebellion. He also sang songs of how the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in the South was a reminder that the Union had triumphed in the end.⁵⁵ The songs appearing the Iowa G.A.R. songbook included the patriotic songs “America” and “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and the pro-Union songs “Battle Cry of Freedom” and “Marching through Georgia.” In fact, pro-Union songs make up half of the five-page song book.⁵⁶

After the World War I Era, the Iowa G.A.R.’s numbers continued to decline as did the frequency of their reunions. By 1935, only a few hundred members remained. In 1948, the last Iowa veteran of the Civil War died, and after a brief memorial reunion in 1949, the Iowa Department of the G.A.R. was disbanded.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it is clear from the reunions that did occur that pro-Union nationalism was still alive and well during the waning years

⁵⁴ William Harding, “Address to the Iowa Department of the G.A.R.,” *Journal of the Forty-third Annual Encampment*, 145-154.

⁵⁵ Iowa G.A.R., *Journal of the Forty-third Annual Encampment*, 182-183.

⁵⁶ Iowa G.A.R., *Songs of the Grand Army of the Republic and Auxiliary Organizations Iowa Department* (Fort Dodge: Essenger Printing Co., 1923), 1-5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 35-48; Iowa Grand Army of the Republic, *Journal of the Seventy-fifth Annual Encampment of the Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic* (Des Moines: Unnamed Publisher, 1949).

of the Iowa G.A.R.. Not even the collective national spirit of World War I was able to completely eradicate it in favor of the umbrella nationalism Janney argues for.

Conclusion

From its founding in 1868 to its dissolution in 1949, the Iowa Department of the G.A.R. played a major role in shaping a pro-Union nationalism among Iowa veterans at reunions and through pamphlets. The reunions of Iowa G.A.R. veterans demonstrate how sectionalism and pro-Union nationalism lingered in the G.A.R. well into the twentieth century. During the early years of the G.A.R., Iowans began creating a pro-Union nationalism founded on the idea that the right had triumphed over the wrong. They sang pro-Union songs and wrote pro-Union poems. During the 1880s to 1910s, Iowans continued the traditions they began in the early days of the G.A.R. singing pro-Union songs and giving sectionalist speeches. Even in the later days of the G.A.R., Iowa veterans continued to promote a pro-Union nationalism by demonstrating true patriotism in supporting a president during war regardless of party and having flags and pro-Union articles, such as the Gettysburg Address, disseminated in schools around the state. As Secretary of War Belknap had noted in 1870, these Union veterans were surrounding themselves with “the memories of battle ... once again.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ William Belknap, “Address of General Wm. W. Belknap Secretary of War at the Re-union of Iowa Soldiers, Des Moines, Iowa,” August 31, 1870, 14-16.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Belknap, William. "Address of General Wm. W. Belknap Secretary of War at the Re-union of Iowa Soldiers, Des Moines, Iowa." August 31, 1870.

By Laws and Roster of Torrence Post No. 2 Grand Army of the Republic Department of Iowa. Keokuk, 1891.

First and Second Re-unions of the Thirty-Fifth Iowa Infantry Held at Muscatine, Iowa. Muscatine, 1890.

Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic, *Journal of the Forty-third Annual Encampment Department of Iowa Grand Army of the Republic at Davenport.* Des Moines: J. H. Welch Printing Co., 1917.

_____. *Journal of the Seventy-fifth Annual Encampment of the Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic.* Des Moines, 1949.

_____. *Journal of Proceedings Thirty-ninth Annual Encampment Department of Iowa G.A.R.* Des Moines: J. H. Welch Printing Co., 1913.

Kissick, Robert. *The Duty and Necessity of Teaching True American Patriotism.* Des Moines: J. H. Welch Printing Co., 1907.

Lee, Robert E. "General Order No. 9." April 10, 1865.

Press Copies of Letters Sent, War Department, 1896-1913. Record Group 107. National Archives. Washington, D.C.

"Robert E. Lee." *Collier's Weekly*. Vol. 38, No. 17. January 1907.

Smith, William. *Complete G.A.R. Songbook*. Detroit: Herald Publishing House, 1887.

Songs of the Grand Army of the Republic and Auxiliary Organizations Iowa Department. Fort Dodge: Essenger Printing Co., 1923.

State Historical Society of Iowa. *The Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic*. Iowa City: Athens Press, 1936.

Secondary Sources

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 2006.

Blight, David. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Bohannon, Keith. "These Few Gray-Haired, Battle-Scarred Veterans': Confederate Army Reunions in Georgia, 1885-95." In *The Myth of the Lost Cause*

Bautz

and Civil War History, edited by Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000: 89-110.

Foster, Gaines. *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865-1913*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Gannon, Barbara. *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Janney, Caroline. *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Kammen, Michael. *Mystic Chords of Memory*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.

McConnell, Stuart. *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

Neff, John. *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005.

Purcell, Sarah. *Sealed With Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Waldrep, Christopher. *Vicksburg's Long Shadow:
The Civil War Legacy of Race and Remembrance.*
Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

Ambrose Burnside, the Ninth Army Corps, and the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House

Ryan T. Quint

Spring had come and that meant that the bloodletting could begin anew. For Major General Ambrose Everett Burnside that campaign commenced on April 13, 1864 when he arrived in Annapolis, Maryland to rendezvous with his Ninth Army Corps.¹ Around the city that was home to the U.S. Naval Academy the soldiers in the corps' three divisions milled about, drilling and organizing. Most of the men in the divisions were brand new recruits, learning the school of the soldier for the first time. These recruits were shuffled into regiments shrunken by years of arduous fighting for the Union all the way from the North Carolina Coast in the spring of 1862 to, most recently, the Siege of Knoxville.²

The same day that Burnside arrived in Annapolis he paraded the Ninth Corps in review for recently-promoted Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant.³ As general-in-chief

¹ William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 345.

² Augustus Woodbury, *Major General Ambrose E. Burnside and the Ninth Army Corps: A Narrative of Campaigns* (Providence: Sidney S. Rider & Brother, 1867), 365, 367; William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War* (Albany: Albany Publishing Company, 1889), 81-83.

³ A word on the convention of writing out Federal corps is useful here. Though the practice of identifying Federal corps with Roman numerals is the accepted practice today, during the war the corps were identified with either regular numbers or were spelled out. I also agree with the late Harry Pfanz, who wrote that “[F]or me...Roman numerals always

of the United States Army, it was expected that he would have set up his headquarters in the nation's capital, but Grant decided to take the field. Grant found the Ninth Corps in "an admirable position for such a reinforcement." From its location Burnside's men "could be brought at the last moment as a reinforcement to the Army of the Potomac, or it could be thrown on the sea-coast, south of Norfolk, in Virginia, or North Carolina, to operate against Richmond from that direction." Though Grant had witnessed these soldiers pass in review this was hardly the reason he had come all the way to Annapolis from his field headquarters near Culpeper; rather it was to "confer with Burnside about the role the Ninth Corps would play in the spring campaign...."⁴

That role, Burnside soon found out, was to support the Army of the Potomac with an overland march. On April 23 the Ninth Corps packed up its tents and formed into marching columns. To the surprise of many of the soldiers, the corps began to march towards Washington, D.C., not down to the Annapolis docks. It had made its fame on a naval expedition against North Carolina's Outer Banks in 1862 and still had the legacy to prove it: its insignia was an anchor and cannon, crossed over a shield. Many expected to repeat their success at sea with another strike at a rebel

require a pause for translation that snags my train of thought." Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), xvii.

⁴ Ulysses S. Grant, *Memoirs and Selected Letters* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1990 reprint), 477; Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 271.

Quint

target.⁵ But this coming campaign would involve no ships for the Ninth Corps, only grueling marches and hard fighting.

As the corps neared Washington City a fourth division, consisting entirely of United States Colored Troops, was added to the corps. Burnside's command was now composed of close to 21,000 men and 72 cannons ready for action.⁶ Entering the capital, the corps marched past throngs of cheering crowds while the divisions' "soiled and tattered flags, bearing inscriptions of battles in six states, east and west, were silent and affecting witnesses of their valor and their sacrifices."⁷ Crossing Long Bridge into Virginia, the corps continued its march until, by May 5, they were closing in on the Army of the Potomac. As the regiments neared the battlefield, one man later wrote, "Every soldier knew that we were about to participate in a battle, as the booming of cannon and the rattle of musketry were heard long before... The trail of the regiments preceding us was made plain by the thousands of playing cards strewn along the wayside, which they had discarded from their blouse pockets to make room for their

⁵ For the naval expedition, see Marvel, 41-97; for the corps insignia see C. McKeever, *Civil War Battle flags of the Union Army and Order of Battle* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1997 reprint), 81-82.

⁶ Darrell L. Collins, *Army of the Potomac: Order of Battle, 1861-1865, with Commanders, Strengths Losses, and More* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2013), 168.

⁷ Woodbury, 368.

testaments, which had reposed unopened, in many cases, for weeks, in their knapsacks.”⁸

For Ambrose Burnside, the march to join the Army of the Potomac would not have marshaled good memories. He had last seen the army after resigning its command following the horrific defeat at Fredericksburg in December, 1862, followed immediately by the embarrassing “Mud March.” As Burnside prepared to leave the army in early 1863, he remarked, “Farewell Gentlemen, there are no pleasant reminiscences for me connected with the Army of the Potomac.”⁹ For its part, the Army of the Potomac was not sorry to see Burnside to go, and blamed the side-whiskered general wholeheartedly for its bloody defeat.

Now, in the spring of 1864, Burnside was returning to the Army of the Potomac, and it was already creating problems. The most serious matter was that of seniority— with Burnside’s return he should, by his commission’s date, assume command of the Army of the Potomac, taking it away from George Meade. Burnside had been commissioned a major general of volunteers to date from March 18, 1862, while Meade did not attain the same rank

⁸ Allen D. Albert, editor, *History of the Forty-Fifth Regiment Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteer Infantry 1861-1865* (Williamsport, PA: Grit Publishing Company, 1912), 114.

⁹ A. Wilson Greene, “Morale, Maneuver, and Mud” in Gary W. Gallagher, *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Decision on the Rappahannock* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 215; Francis A. O’Reilly, *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 495-496.

until November 29 of the same year.¹⁰ No one expected or would have allowed for Burnside to take command of the army, and Grant settled on an independent structure for the Ninth Corps— Burnside would report directly to Grant and get orders from him while the other three infantry corps would answer to Meade. It was a clunky system that would prove largely ineffective—especially at Spotsylvania, whose bloodiest fighting lay just under a week away.¹¹

The second problem facing Burnside's return to the Army of the Potomac, even with his independent command, was the fact that no one within the army had any confidence in him. Though beyond the scope of this narrative the second day of the Battle of the Wilderness on May 6, 1864 is worth mentioning in passing only because it shows the lack of confidence and low expectations that army officers had for Burnside. On the Federal left Winfield Scott Hancock's Second Corps crashed through the woods and hit elements of A.P. Hill's Confederates— some of the same rebels that Burnside would fight at Spotsylvania in six days' time. As Burnside's corps was coming up, his three divisions, led by Thomas Stevenson, Robert Potter, and Orlando Willcox, were all ordered

¹⁰ George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, at West Point, N.Y.: Volume II* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1868), 191; George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., Volume I* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1868),

¹¹ Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness May 5-6, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 48.

forward.¹² But in the thick confines of the Wilderness the troops were given unclear directions and “bushwhacked toward their indistinct goal,” as one historian writes.¹³ Another historian, Gordon C. Rhea, wrote that “For the rest of the morning, the [Ninth] Corps remained lost to the Federal war effort. Occasionally messages emerged from the undergrowth, but the troops themselves seemed to have been swallowed up by the Wilderness.”¹⁴

To the men and officers of the Army of the Potomac though, it mattered little that the three divisions got lost. What they remembered was the fact that when they needed support, Burnside came up short. As Theodore Lyman, aide to George Meade, met with Hancock, he reported that Burnside was slowly making progress, to which the Second Corps commander bellowed, “I knew it.... Just what I expected.”¹⁵ One of Hancock’s staff officers wrote years later that when Burnside did finally get into action, “assistance it could hardly be called, for, when Burnside at last made his attack, Hancock had already been driven back....”¹⁶ Charles Wainwright, an artillery officer in the Fifth Corps, wrote in his diary, “Burnside somehow is

¹² The Fourth Division, commanded by Edward Ferrero, was detached and did not take part in the Battle of the Wilderness. See Burnside’s report, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series 1, Vol. 36, pt. 1, 906 (hereafter cited as OR, followed by part, volume, and page number—all series are 1).

¹³ Marvel, *Burnside*, 355.

¹⁴ Rhea, *Wilderness*, 331.

¹⁵ Theodore Lyman, *Meade’s Headquarters 1863-1865* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1922), 94.

¹⁶ Francis A. Walker, *History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1886), 427.

never up to the mark when the tug comes.” Wainwright also commented on Burnside’s subordinate officers, saying, “I got a very poor impression of the corps.”¹⁷

Following the tactical stalemate at the Wilderness, which resulted in little other than close to 30,000 casualties, Grant decided to shift his forces south, towards Spotsylvania Court House. Burnside’s men moved back towards Chancellorsville and then began sliding further south, reaching the Fredericksburg Road on May 9. This road ran straight from Fredericksburg to Grant’s objective of Spotsylvania Court House. When Burnside’s men reached the road, they now served as the Federals’ left flank.¹⁸

With Orlando Willcox’s division leading the way down the Fredericksburg Road, Burnside soon a problem that would plague the entire Federal command. Bad maps had been distributed before the campaign began and now, with Grant trying to issue orders to both Burnside and Meade’s Army of the Potomac, the problems associated with those maps bubbled to the surface. First was the maps’ quality—Theodore Lyman wrote that the maps were

¹⁷ Charles W. Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, edited by Allan Nevins (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998), 352.

¹⁸ On the Wilderness’ casualties, see Noah Andre Trudeau, *Bloody Roads South: The Wilderness to Cold Harbor, May-June 1864* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 341; on the movement of the Ninth Corps see Burnside’s OR, Vol. 36, pt. 1, 907-908; Spotsylvania Court House serving as Grant’s objective can be found in Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern: May 7-12, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 13.

printed “on wretched spongy paper, which wore out after being carried a few days in the pocket....” Furthermore, Lyman pointed out that many of the maps had key points on them entirely out of position—pertinent to the Battle of the Spotsylvania Court House was the fact that the courthouse itself was portrayed “two and one half miles to the west [from where it is actually located].”¹⁹

Most problematic to Burnside on May 9 was the issue of the location of a “Gate”, as well as the Gayle house. This problem would resonate through the next couple of days of the battle, culminating with the fighting on May 12. Grant issued orders to Burnside, ordering him to send “a small force from Gate toward Spotsylvania to reconnoiter the roads and enemy’s position in that direction, and especially have all roads leading to your right... examined... and whether they lead to the positions occupied by General Meade’s forces.....”²⁰ In other words, Willcox, whose division was leading the corps, was to skirmish ahead and see which roads, if any, could link up with the Army of the Potomac so that the Federal line could be one solid front.

There are numerable problems with this order, but the main concern is the usage of “Gate.” Going back to the horrendous maps, it appears that “Gate” was mentioned on both Grant’s and Meade’s maps, but not Burnside’s. The choice to write Gate as a proper noun also implies that

¹⁹ Theodore Lyman, “Uselessness of Maps,” in *The Wilderness Campaign May-June 1864, Volume IV* (Boston: The Military Historical Society of Massachusetts), 79-80.

²⁰ OR, Vol. 36, pt. 2, 580.

Grant and Meade both believed that the Gate was the property of a local. There was indeed a gate along the Ninth Corps' advance, but it was just that—a toll gate, not a large house, and furthermore, it was far to the rear of Willcox's advance. Nonetheless, Willcox pushed on ahead, towards the Gayle house, a structure on the north-eastern side of the river. There his skirmishers ran into Confederate pickets of infantry and dismounted cavalry and the two sides began to open a lively fire. Willcox reported back to Burnside that he had "Found the enemy's vedettes one-half mile before reaching Gayle's house."²¹ Reporting back to Grant, Burnside reiterated the "Gayle" house. And then, in a snafu classic for military history, both Grant and Burnside assumed the other was misspelling the g-word—whether it was "Gate" or "Gayle" and neither asked for clarification. It didn't help that on the map that Grant possessed, the gate was marked where the Gayle house actually stood.²²

At the end of the day on May 9, Willcox had nonetheless pushed across the Ni River and drove away the Confederate pickets. From his current position Willcox was only about 1.5 miles away from Spotsylvania Court House, and ahead of him lay just more Confederate pickets—had the Third Division pressed down the road, the likelihood of capturing the courthouse and its vital crossroads was very

²¹ OR, Vol. 36, pt. 2, 581; for detailed topographic maps of the Spotsylvania area, see map series "Battle of Spotsylvania Court House", produced by Steven Stanley, 2000.

²² William D. Matter, *If It Takes All Summer: The Battle of Spotsylvania* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 110.

high. The Federal high command's faulty cartography depicted the distance between the Ni River crossing and Spotsylvania as 3.5 miles, however. Gordon C. Rhea summarizes this whole episode as "Burnside missed a superb opportunity."²³ Later that night Burnside finally tried to clear up the confusion, writing, "The position occupied by General Willcox is at Mr. Gayle's house, there being no such place as Gate in this section...."²⁴ The note apparently did not stick; in his postwar history of the campaign, Meade's chief of staff Andrew Humphreys wrote that "General Burnside moved with the Ninth Corps... to Gate's house, on the road from [Spotsylvania] Court House to Fredericksburg, and then toward the Court House, crossing the [Ni] at Gate's house (a mile and a half from the Court House)...."²⁵ At least by the 1880s Humphreys had learned the true distance from the river to Spotsylvania.

If May 9 had been difficult for Burnside in trying to get through the ambiguous orders, May 10 was difficult because Burnside lost his "ablest division commander."²⁶ Brigadier General Thomas Stevenson brought his First Division forward to support Willcox's command in solidifying their front on the southern side of the Ni River. Seeking some shade (the mercury recorded 89 degrees at 2

²³ Matter, 110; Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 103.

²⁴ Burnside to Grant, OR, Vol. 36, pt. 2, 583.

²⁵ Humphreys, *The Virginia Campaign of 1864-1865* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 72.

²⁶ Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 182.

PM in Washington City—65 miles north),²⁷ Stevenson lounged about and smoked cigars with his staff. Then, breaking the brief reprieve in an extremely bloody fashion, a bullet cracked through the back of Stevenson’s head, toppling him over. The twenty-eight year old Brigadier General was dead almost instantly. Burnside wrote that Stevenson’s death was a “severe misfortune” and that the general had “on all occasions proved himself an efficient soldier.”²⁸ As Stevenson’s body was sent back to Boston, Colonel Daniel Leasure took over command of the First Division. One of his new staff officers wrote, “I had a favorable opinion of him, but I can’t say I retain it.”²⁹ Over the course of the next day Burnside was hesitant to further use the division under Leasure.

By May 10, the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House was into its third day. By this point of the battle Confederate engineers had laid out their defensive works—the most famous being the Mule Shoe Salient. Measuring “1,800 yards wide at the base and 1,320 yards deep from the base to the tip”,³⁰ the Mule Shoe was truly massive and also proved to be a liability for its Confederate defenders; a salient can be attacked from three sides at once, making it

²⁷ Robert K. Krick, *Civil War Weather in Virginia* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 129.

²⁸ Derek Smith, *The Gallant Dead: Union and Confederate Generals Killed in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2005), 230; Burnside’s OR, Vol. 36, pt. 1, 908-909.

²⁹ Marvel, *Burnside*, 360.

³⁰ Earl J. Hess, *Trench Warfare under Grant and Lee: Field Fortifications in the Overland Campaign* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 47.

difficult to defend. As Lee's line continued, the Confederate engineers followed the natural contour lines of the ridge they were on and dug a second salient, this one "a minor protrusion in comparison [to the Mule Shoe]... The trench was over five feet deep, and pine logs topped the parapet."³¹ This second salient would be guarded mostly by men of Henry Heth's division, thus the position got its name—Heth's Salient. These works would soon become the focus of major Federal attacks.

There was little fighting on Burnside's front on May 11, but plenty of maneuvering. As Grant planned his big offensive against Lee's line for the next day, the Ninth Corps spent the majority of the day re-crossing the Ni River back to the north side. In the midst of driving rain storms, this proved difficult to do. Once the high command realized what was going on, the corps was ordered to re-cross the river again and regain their works on the south side of the river. The end result was that the Ninth Corps spent the majority of May 11 in the rain marching back and forth only to end up in the exact same place as they had started, only now exhausted and soaked to the bone. Burnside denied ordering the move, as did Grant—historian William Matter writes that "Until more evidence is uncovered, this episode will remain a mystery."³²

In the meantime, the soldiers of the Ninth Corps suffered for the lack of shelter. One soldier in the 57th Massachusetts wrote, "The afternoon of the 11th [of May]

³¹ Hess, *Trench Warfare under Grant and Lee*, 58-59.

³² Matter, *If it Takes All Summer*, 174.

was rainy, which continued through the night. The Fifty-Seventh rested upon their arms without shelter of any kind, the ground was wet and the men's clothing also, with no opportunity of getting dry; sleep was impossible...."³³ Another soldier in the 7th Rhode Island added, "The rain poured in torrents over the hundreds lying around. Few had blankets."³⁴ For all of their marches, the soldiers did not reach their trenches until about 10:00 PM, which meant they had about six hours to lie around in the mud until going forward.³⁵

While the Ninth Corps moved about and struggled with the elements, Burnside got his orders for the next day's attack. Grant's message to Burnside was time-stamped at 4:00 PM, but the latter probably did not get the order "until near dark"—sunset on May 11 was three minutes shy of 7:00 PM.³⁶ In his orders, Grant wrote that "You will move against the enemy with your entire force promptly and with all possible vigor at precisely 4 o'clock to-morrow morning. Let your preparations for this attack be conducted with the utmost secrecy, and veiled entirely from the enemy."³⁷ To assist Burnside, Grant ordered two of his

³³ John Anderson, *The Fifty-Seventh Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion* (Boston: E.B. Stillings & Co., 1896), 80.

³⁴ William Palmer Hopkins, *The Seventh Regiment Rhode Island Volunteers in the Civil War, 1862-1865* (Boston: Hub Engraving Co., 1903), 169.

³⁵ Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 218.

³⁶ Marvel, *Burnside*, 362, Krick, *Civil War in Virginia*, 129.

³⁷ OR, Vol. 36, pt. 2, 643.

aides, Cyrus Comstock and Orville Babcock, to attach themselves to the Ninth Corps staff and direct the attacks.

After getting his orders Burnside began to plan his corps' attacks. Some have criticized Burnside for his lack of overall preparations in these stages of the battle—one historian writes that he was “befuddled” and “dithered” in front of the enemy on May 10, and he characterized Burnside’s fighting on May 12 as “a spectacle of embarrassing confusion.”³⁸ Ambrose Burnside serves as an easy target for these historians as the debacle at Fredericksburg will always stain his name, but it is unfair to claim that Burnside did nothing but spew incompetence; in the midst of the Ninth Corps’ preparations on the night of May 11 it is important to remember Grant’s warning to keep the movements an “utmost secrecy, and veiled entirely from the enemy,” a line that his two aides also reiterated.³⁹ In this setting, it is easy to understand why Burnside was hesitant to send scouts forward to reconnoiter the ground, especially when Comstock, one of the aides from Grant, had already done so earlier in the day, could provide Burnside with whatever directions he needed. Furthermore, after arriving at Burnside’s headquarters in the dark, “Comstock suggested no reconnaissance.”⁴⁰

³⁸ John Cannan, *Spotsylvania Campaign: May 7-21* (Conshohocken: Combined Books, 1997), 98; John Cannan, *Bloody Angle: Hancock’s Assault on the Mule Shoe Salient May 12, 1864* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002), 135.

³⁹ See Note 37.

⁴⁰ Comstock’s reconnaissance is found in Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 215; Marvel, *Burnside*, 362.

In the midst of all this, another curveball was thrown at Burnside when Major General Thomas L. Crittenden arrived and took over command of the corps' First Division.⁴¹ Crittenden was another general whose presence threatened to upend the army's hierarchy; his major general's commission dated from July 17, 1862, four months before George Meade.⁴² By assigning Crittenden to the independent Ninth Corps, the matter of commissions were avoided, but Crittenden had other baggage he brought along. In the Chickamauga Campaign in the early fall of 1863 Crittenden had commanded the Army of the Cumberland's Twenty-First Corps, totaling almost 11,000 infantrymen.⁴³ With his defeat at Chickamauga, William S. Rosecrans looked for scapegoats, and one of those men was Crittenden. In late January of 1864, a court of inquiry was established to "investigate the conduct of" three generals, including Crittenden.⁴⁴ Over the next twenty-one days the court heard testimony and examined the Battle of Chickamauga in detail before it absolved Crittenden and wrote, "The evidence... respecting General Crittenden's operations... not only shows no cause for censure, but, on the contrary, that his whole conduct was most creditable...."⁴⁵ Though absolved, the court was still a stain

⁴¹ OR, Vol. 36, pt. 1, 909.

⁴² Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 100.

⁴³ Crittenden's force is tallied up from figures compiled in David A. Powell, *The Chickamauga Campaign: August 22-September 19, 1863* (El Dorado Hills: Savas Beatie, 2014), 639-641.

⁴⁴ OR, Vol. 30, pt. 1, 930.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 996.

on Crittenden, and whereas he had commanded close to 11,000 troops at Chickamauga, his First Division command in the Ninth Corps now only tallied about 2,100.⁴⁶

With poor maps, a tired and soaked corps, and a new division commander with only a couple of hours' experience in command, Ambrose Burnside prepared his attack in the early morning hours of Thursday, May 12, 1864. According to orders, Robert Potter's Second Division left their works around four in the morning and began to slide north, looking to link up with Hancock's Second Corps. By punctually ordering Potter's division up, Gordon C. Rhea says Burnside was "displaying unaccustomed vigor", but Burnside biographer William Marvel would disagree with this assessment, writing "Burnside had never had much trouble holding up his end of a schedule before[.]"⁴⁷ Either way, Potter's force of about 5,700 men crashed through the woods and struck the eastern salient of the Mule Shoe just minutes after Hancock's men had completely shattered the top of it.⁴⁸ The Confederate defenders of the tip of the salient were almost all captured en masse, leaving Hancock's men with some 2,700 prisoners to take care of.⁴⁹ However, the success also came

⁴⁶ Troop strength comes from Collins' strength of First Division before the Wilderness, 168, and subtracting 535 casualties, as evidenced in OR, Vol. 36, pt. 1, 131. This figure does not account for any casualties the First Division would have suffered on May 10 or 11 due to skirmishing.

⁴⁷ Rhea, *Spotsylvania*, 244; Marvel, *Burnside*, 473 (n. 25).

⁴⁸ Potter's strength, Collins, 168.

⁴⁹ Alfred C. Young III, *Lee's Army during the Overland Campaign: A Numerical Study* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2013), 236

Quint

with problems. An officer in Hancock's corps wrote that, "All line and formation was now lost...Amid the wild confusion of the glorious success, it was difficult to preserve order."⁵⁰ In this confused melee, Potter's three brigades hit below Hancock and got some of their own spoils, including two captured cannon.⁵¹

The confusion of the Federal breakthrough assisted the Confederate response immensely. Gathering his brigade of almost 2,000 North Carolinians, James Lane pushed up to the edge of the salient. As other Confederate brigades, mostly from Ewell's Second Corps, were hitting Hancock, Lane focused his attention on Potter's men. His five regiments in tow, Lane moved forward and later wrote, "In the best of spirits the brigade welcomed the furious assault, which soon followed, with prolonged cheers and death dealing volleys[.]"⁵²

Lane's men were soon joined by the combined weight of the 2,500 men present in Alfred Scales' and Edward Thomas' brigades. The three Confederate brigades soon proved too much for Potter's men and the Federals gave ground, even giving up the two cannon they had captured earlier. Potter wrote in his report, "The connection on our right with the Second Corps being broken... we were forced out of the enemy's work with a few prisoners."

⁵⁰ St. Clair A. Mulholland, *The Story Of The 116th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers In the War of the Rebellion* (Philadelphia: F. McManus, Jr & Co., 1903), 209.

⁵¹ OR, Vol. 36, pt. 1, 928.

⁵² Young, 246; Lane's Report in *Southern Historical Society Papers: Volume 9*, 146.

By 8:00 AM Potter's men were out of their breach and spent the rest of the day trading shots with the rebels to their immediate front as well as small sorties against the rebel works which accomplished little.⁵³

As Burnside tried to get a handle on the fighting to his front, Grant pushed him to send more troops in. Increasingly frustrated at his commander's impatience, Burnside crumpled up and threw on the ground one dispatch and, at another demand, verbally snapped at Comstock. The firing continued at its heaviest near the western salient of the Mule Shoe, which would soon get its infamous name of the Bloody Angle. Hoping to help, Burnside ordered more attacks, this time not at the eastern salient, but at the rebel positions further south—at Heth's Salient.⁵⁴

Thomas Crittenden's First Division was picked for this task, and its two brigades began to advance through the swampy ravines and bottomlands, crashing through the woods closer and closer to Heth's line. But with Crittenden's newness to the division, combined with the two brigades' near-total exhaustion, the fighting formation did not make it far. As the Federals stumbled towards Heth's Salient, the Confederates behind their works readied their rifles. The rebels in these works belonged to the two brigades of Joseph Davis and Robert Mayo, who together had about 2,300 men. As soon as Crittenden's men came

⁵³ Combined strength of Scales and Thomas, Young, 246; Potter's report, Vol. 36, pt. 1, 928; Steven Stanley Map Series, "Battle of Spotsylvania Court House", Map 12 of 24.

⁵⁴ Marvel, *Burnside*, 364.

Quint

into view, the two brigades opened fire. Heth, who ironically had been roommates with Burnside at West Point, wrote, “[Crittenden’s] attack was met with firmness and repelled with gallantry. The enemy left many dead and wounded in our front. A stand of colors was captured during this affair...”⁵⁵ Adding to his rather stoic report, Heth allowed himself some more prose in his memoirs, where he added, “On the [12th] of May my breastworks [were] vigorously assailed by General Burnside... the attacking force, or some of them, came within thirty paces of my breastworks; at the same time my infantry poured a shower of lead into Burnside’s troops. They were exposed to a raking fire of my artillery on my right, where I had some twenty pieces in position.”⁵⁶

Crittenden’s repulse left Burnside with only Orlando Willcox’s division. The corps’ Third Division moved off towards the salient, hoping to break through in one-last attempt. With the fighting at the Bloody Angle having descended into a maddened killing spree of little overall importance, Burnside’s ultimate objective was to break through Heth’s Salient, forcing Lee to move men away from the Mule Shoe, potentially opening the door to a final Federal success. Willcox’s two brigades moved off in the same fashion as Crittenden, whose disjointed fragments also tried to join the attack. Joining the infantry were four

⁵⁵ Henry Heth, *Heth’s Report of Spring 1864 to October 1864*, unpublished, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park archives; Henry Heth *Memoirs Henry Heth*, edited by James L. Morrison (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 185-186.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

batteries of guns under the Ninth Corps Chief of Artillery, Lieutenant Samuel Benjamin.⁵⁷ As Willcox's two brigades, under John Hartranft and Benjamin Christ, advanced they soon came under the same fire that had met Crittenden's division, together with an added thrust—a Confederate counter-attack of two brigades, centered against Willcox's left and aimed straight at the four batteries of artillery.

Looking to do the exact same thing as Grant, but in reverse, Robert E. Lee looked to take pressure off the Mule Shoe, and saw the easiest way to do so would be to hit the Federal left—Burnside's corps. Willcox's attack was timed almost perfectly to the same moment that the Confederate attack struck out from the right flank of Heth's Salient. The two brigades belonged to David Weisiger and James Lane, the latter having already repulsed Robert Potter earlier in the morning. As Lane's men led the attack, though, they "commenced yelling too soon and drew upon themselves a terrible fire of canister from four of the guns..."⁵⁸

The fighting around Benjamin's batteries descended into chaos. Willcox wrote in his diary, "At one time the enemy was within ten paces, but the 2nd Michigan, supporting this battery, re-manned the guns and with the aid of canister of the other batteries, repulsed the charge splendidly."⁵⁹ While the fighting swirled about the batteries, the musketry from within Heth's Salient

⁵⁷ OR, Vol. 36, pt. 1, 941.

⁵⁸ *Southern Historical Society Papers: Volume 9*, 148.

⁵⁹ Orlando B. Willcox, *Forgotten Valor: The Memoirs, Journals, & Civil War Letters of Orlando B. Willcox*, edited by Robert Garth Scott (Kent State University of Press, 1999), 521.

Quint

continued to hit Willcox's brigades from the front, and Willcox noted that "my front line suffered severely in killed, wounded, and prisoners...."⁶⁰ Especially caught in the middle, not only by the fire to their front, but also by Weisiger's and Lane's counter-attack, the 17th Michigan nearly ceased to exist—"only four dozen men escaped."⁶¹ Though it was able to repulse Weisiger and Lane, Willcox's division's attack was spent before it really got a chance to get underway. The attack slunk back to its defensive works, ending, for all practical purposes, the fighting around Heth's Salient on May 12.

So ended Ambrose Burnside's attacks on May 12 at Spotsylvania. Strategically, why were they important? In his memoirs, Grant perhaps expressed it best when he wrote, "Burnside accomplished but little of a positive nature, but negatively a great deal. He kept Lee from reinforcing his [center] from that quarter."⁶² In other words, Burnside's attacks kept portions of three Confederate divisions (Heth, Cadmus Wilcox, and William Mahone) away from the Mule Shoe—troops that could have been used to tip the balance and completely evict the Federal breakthrough. Others, however, were not so willing to see what Burnside had accomplished. Only knowing that Burnside failed to break Heth's line, a staff officer in the

⁶⁰ Willcox, *Forgotten Valor*, 521.

⁶¹ Marvel, *Burnside*, 365.

⁶² Grant, *Memoirs*, 554.

Sixth Corps wrote that Burnside was a “[damned] humbug.”⁶³

It is difficult to get an understanding of the casualty counts for the Ninth Corps as well as the Confederates from the fighting near Heth’s Salient. In his report, Burnside claimed that the corps had lost 1,500 killed, wounded, and captured, but that figure also included losses in the days following May 12. Confederate counts encompass the entirety of the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, which for Henry Heth, meant stand-up fights against the Second Corps in the days before fighting against Burnside. For the entire battle, Heth’s division suffered 350 casualties, while Lane’s brigade, which seemed to be everywhere on May 12, claimed 470 casualties for the day.⁶⁴

Had Burnside broken through at Heth’s Salient, it would have broken open Lee’s line. After the collapse of the Mule Shoe, Lee had his engineers, joined by soldiers who were routed from the initial clash there work feverishly on a fallback line, digging into the wet earth with “pick and shovel.”⁶⁵ However, that fallback line ran along with, and incorporated Heth’s Salient. Had any of Burnside’s attacks broken through, the entirety of the new line would be useless as the Ninth Corps came crashing down onto the unfinished trench system. From there, Lee’s

⁶³ Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr, *Touched with Fire: Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. 1861-1864*, edited by Mark De Wolfe Howe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 116.

⁶⁴ OR, Vol. 36, pt. 1, 911; Young, *Lee’s Army*, 246; *Southern Historical Society Papers: Volume 9*, 152.

⁶⁵ Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants: Volume III*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), 408-409.

Quint

options and his defensive nature against Grant would have been severely limited.

But Burnside did not break through. He did not break through because of the actions of the Confederates at Heth's Salient, who held steady in the face of three separate attacks, and even managed their own attack that sent Willcox's division sprawling back in confusion. Any discussion of what might have been beyond this is mere conjecture and opinion. For all the damage done, the bloodletting was not over. The armies would move steadily south, all the way to Petersburg, where a mine, an explosion, and a bloody crater waited for Major General Ambrose Burnside.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Albert Allen D, editor. *History of the Forty-Fifth Regiment Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteer Infantry 1861-1865*. Williamsport, PA: Grit Publishing Company, 1912.

Anderson, John. *The Fifty-Seventh Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion*. Boston: E.B. Stillings & Co., 1896.

Cullum, George W. *Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, at West Point, N.Y.: Volume 1*. New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1868).

_____. *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., Volume 2*. New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1868.

Fox, William F. *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War*. Albany: Albany Publishing Company, 1889.

Grant, Ulysses S. *Memoirs and Selected Letters*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1990 reprint.

Heth, Henry. *Heth's Report of Spring 1864 to October 1864*, unpublished, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park Archives.

Quint

_____. *Memoirs of Henry Heth*. Edited by James L. Morrison. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974.

Holmes, Oliver Wendell Jr. *Touched with Fire: Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr, 1861-1864*. Edited by Mark De Wolfe Howe. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946.

Hopkins, William Palmer. *The Seventh Regiment Rhode Island Volunteers in the Civil War, 1862-1865*. Boston: Hub Engraving Co., 1903.

Humphreys, Andrew. *The Virginia Campaign of 1864-1865*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883.

Lyman, Theodore "Uselessness of Maps." In *The Wilderness Campaign May-June 1864, Volume 4*. Boston: The Military Historical Society of Massachusetts.

_____. *Meade's Headquarters 1863-1865*. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1922.

McKeever, C. *Civil War Battle Flags of the Union Army and Order of Battle*. New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1997 reprint.

Mulholland, St. Clair A. *The Story Of The 116th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers In the War of the Rebellion*. Philadelphia: F. McManus, Jr & Co., 1903.

Lane, James H. "Battle of Spotsylvania Court-House — Report of General Lane." In *Southern Historical Society Papers: Volume 9*.

United States War Department. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion*. Washington: Government Printing Press, 1880-1901.

Wainwright, Charles W. *A Diary of Battle*. Edited by Allan Nevins. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998.

Walker, Francis A. *History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886.

Willcox, Orlando B. *Forgotten Valor: The Memoirs, Journals, & Civil War Letters of Orlando B. Willcox*. Edited by Robert Garth Scott. Kent State University of Press, 1999.

Woodbury, Augustus. *Major General Ambrose E. Burnside and the Ninth Army Corps: A Narrative of Campaigns*. Providence: Sidney S. Rider & Brother, 1867.

Secondary Sources

Cannan, John. *Bloody Angle: Hancock's Assault on the Mule Shoe Salient May 12, 1864*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002.

_____. *Spotsylvania Campaign: May 7-21*. Conshohocken: Combined Books, 1997.

Collins, Darrell L., *Army of the Potomac: Order of Battle, 1861-1865, with Commanders, Strengths Losses, and More*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2013.

Freeman, Douglas Southall. *Lee's Lieutenants: Volume 3*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944.

Greene, A. Wilson. "Morale, Maneuver, and Mud." In *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Decision on the Rappahannock* edited by Gary W. Gallagher. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Hess, Earl J. *Trench Warfare under Grant and Lee: Field Fortifications in the Overland Campaign*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Krick, Robert K. *Civil War Weather in Virginia*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.

Marvel, William. *Burnside*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Matter, William D., *If It Takes All Summer: The Battle of Spotsylvania*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

O'Reilly, Francis A. *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003.

Pfanz, Harry W. *Gettysburg: The Second Day*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

- Powell, David A. *The Chickamauga Campaign: August 22-September 19, 1863*. El Dorado Hills: Savas Beatie, 2014.
- Rhea, Gordon C. *The Battle of the Wilderness May 5-6, 1864*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994.
- _____. *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern: May 7-12, 1864*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.
- Simpson, Brooks D. *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Smith, Derek. *The Gallant Dead: Union and Confederate Generals Killed in the Civil War*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2005.
- Stanley, Steven. Map series "Battle of Spotsylvania Court House." 2000.
- Trudeau, Noah Andre. *Bloody Roads South: The Wilderness to Cold Harbor, May-June 1864*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989.
- Warner, Ezra J. *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964.
- Young, Alfred C. III. *Lee's Army during the Overland Campaign: A Numerical Study*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2013.

Blair, William A. *With Malice Towards Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Brianna E. Kirk

“Popular understanding of treason, not legal definitions in civil courts, guided actions by Union functionaries, both high and low, throughout the Union and Confederacy,” argues William A. Blair. Popular conceptions of treason – widely shared definitions of loyalty and disloyalty – merged with governmental policy and the military to determine the punishment of traitors both during and after the Civil War. Blair adds a flavor of localism to the traditional narrative of treason in the mid-nineteenth century in his newest book *With Malice Toward Some*, demonstrating that treason did in fact pervade public discourse during the American Civil War. Blair argues that the definition of treason arose more through a collaboration amongst loyal citizens, than top-down policies.

Though it is the only crime defined in the United States Constitution, Blair observes, the Founders purposefully made a treason conviction hard to come by. Since the U.S. had scant precedent regarding how to address a treasonous offense, Union leaders pulled on international law and foreign examples to guide them on how to treat Confederates as “public enemies” without relinquishing them a traitor’s punishment, with all three branches of the government collectively reaching a consensus on how to define and handle treason.

An interesting section of Blair’s book, and one that is receiving more attention from scholars, is a chapter that focuses on the military as an integral part in defining treason and enforcing loyalty. “Many hands beyond the

federal government contributed to the campaign against disloyalty,” he writes. Members of the Union army opposed treasonous language and often arrested ‘traitors’ based on popular definitions of disloyalty – sometimes before higher officials in the Lincoln administration could make an official decision whether to support their action. The Union military influence was also felt in elections, where Blair persuasively claims that they “left a heavy footprint” through the supervision of test oaths and oversight of the ballots to ensure that those deemed disloyal could not vote, especially in the border states. Taken together, the arrests and prosecution of disloyal people and the intimidation faced at the ballot boxes lends the question as to whether the military was working to “stifle political opposition,” or simply enforce loyalty. It was such interactions between soldiers and civilians that determined the “tempo” of loyalty in Civil War America.

Blair’s analysis of the Northern desire to define, locate, and punish treason culminates into the most compelling and perplexing question of his study: Why did the North not hang rebels at the war’s end? Despite Northern outrage over the crimes committed against the Union, no Confederates faced trial, punishment, or execution for treason. Public debates over whether to seek retribution against Confederate leaders like Jefferson Davis delayed their punishment, and the complexity of Reconstruction issues and politics took priority. The federal government worried that pursuing treason trials for top Confederates would not result in the desired convictions. In addition, if rebels like Davis were found guilty of treason and executed so soon after Appomattox, the Federal government feared that they would be consecrated as martyrs. Blair reminds us that even though Confederates did not face the gallows, they received punishment in other

forms. One of the most well-known of these was Fourteenth Amendment, which robbed former Confederates of their political and economic power in the newly rejoined Union.

William Blair convincingly documents conceptions of loyalty and disloyalty in nineteenth century America, providing the topic of treason with the comprehensive analysis that Civil War scholarship needed. Drawing from a large source base of primary and secondary material, the amount of research put into the study is evident on every page. It is a bottom-up history of the complexities of defining treason and loyalty in the Civil War North that is driven by archives, a crucial aspect to the book's success, and is informed by military and legal history. Blair's great strength is that he does not approach the topic through a narrow collection of specific examples, but rather demonstrates how definitions of treason and loyalty were constantly in flux in Northern society. Although Blair's work is an important contribution to the historiography of the American Civil War, there is still more to be written about treason and loyalty in the Civil War era. Other scholars, especially cultural historians, can draw from Blair's work to delve deeper into the meaning of treason and loyalty to see how these ideas and behaviors intersected and interacted in post-war society.

Until then, Blair's captivating study serves its purpose as a key intervention in the field, revealing that while many wanted to follow Lincoln's idea to act merciful toward the Confederacy, others were all too aware that the war could have ended with Southern victory. Unprepared to extend a forgiving hand to traitorous rebels, they wanted to set a precedent and send a clear message to future generations of Americans – that there could be mercy for many, but malice toward some.

Notes

Notes