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## No Tolerance for Cowards or “Yankees:” The Letters of Reuben Allen Pierson, a Confederate Officer

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# No Tolerance for Cowards or “Yankees:” The Letters of Reuben Allen Pierson, a Confederate Officer

## Abstract

Confederate officer Reuben Allen Pierson was a single well-to-do Louisiana slaveholder. He enlisted early in the Ninth Louisiana Infantry, insisting that he joined the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia to defend his freedom, family, and new country. He turned his back on the United States, convinced that his Northern counterparts were subhuman and dishonorable. This paper argues that Reuben Allen Pierson remained steadfast in his convictions about Southern duty and honor, arguing in the Confederacy’s favor even in bleak times. The writer will examine why he clung desperately to the Confederacy and how he was influenced by ideas of honor, Southern manhood, and anti-Northern propaganda. The writer will also discuss how Reuben Allen interpreted Southern women’s obligations to the Confederacy, especially his frustrations with his sister when she failed to uphold her duty to him and the South.

## Keywords

Civil War, Louisiana, Confederacy, letters

## Disciplines

History | Military History | Social History | United States History

## Comments

Written for HIST 428: Letters and Letter Writing

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No Tolerance for Cowards or “Yankees:” The Letters of Reuben Allen Pierson, a Confederate  
Officer

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HIST 428  
Professor Sánchez  
December 14, 2021

In an August 1863 letter to his sister, Mary Catherine “Cassie” Pierson, Louisiana officer Reuben Allen Pierson swore that he “would welcome death a thousand times rather than live” to reunite “with such a band of robbers, murderers & unhumane creatures as we are now fighting.”<sup>1</sup> Reuben Allen expressed the depths of his contempt when he wrote that “the keeper of Hades would refuse such beings” from the gates of hell.<sup>2</sup> This paper argues that Reuben Allen Pierson’s hatred of Northerners and his passionate defense of the Confederacy only intensified under poor conditions, because he believed that he owed it to his family and new nation to fight until his death. Southern cultural notions of honor and anti-Northern propaganda reinforced his beliefs. Even when camp life was challenging, he maintained an optimistic picture of the army’s morale, to assure and encourage his family members that the war continued in the Confederacy’s favor, so long as they fulfilled their duties. He especially singled out his sister to obey her duty to him and the Confederacy, expecting her to follow certain standards for honorable Southern women.

Reuben Allen Pierson was born on September 23, 1834, in Georgia, the second oldest of ten children.<sup>3</sup> The Pierson family moved to Mount Lebanon, Bienville Parish, Louisiana, in 1847.<sup>4</sup> The father, William H. Pierson, owned a plantation which profited from cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, and timber.<sup>5</sup> William Pierson’s real estate was valued at \$6,000 in 1850,

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<sup>1</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in Thomas W. Cutrer and T. Michael Parrish, eds., *Brothers in Gray: The Civil War Letters of the Pierson Family* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 207.

<sup>2</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 207.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas W. Cutrer and T. Michael Parrish, eds., “Introduction” in *Brothers in Gray: The Civil War Letters of the Pierson Family* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 8; Cutrer and Parrish, “Introduction,” in *Brothers in Gray*, 2; “William H. Pierson,” Ancestry.com, *1850 United States Federal Census, Western District, Bienville, Louisiana*; [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Cutrer and Parrish, “Introduction” in *Brothers in Gray*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Cutrer and Parrish, “Introduction” in *Brothers in Gray*, 2.

equivalent to about \$211,000 in 2021.<sup>6</sup> By 1860, William Pierson had such valuable land that he sold the plantation for \$30,000, equivalent to almost one million dollars in 2021.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, the Pierson family had extensive wealth and depended heavily upon the plantation and enslaved labor. The Piersons likely worried that newly elected President Abraham Lincoln, regarded by many Southerners as a radical abolitionist, would abolish slavery and disrupt their wealth and way of life, thereby adding to Reuben Allen's perception of Lincoln as a "Tyrant."<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Reuben Allen's younger brother, David, until his enlistment in spring of 1861, voted against secession during a special convention in early January 1861.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the family initially felt split over secession's constitutionality, although three other brothers besides Reuben Allen enlisted in the Confederate army.<sup>10</sup> Twenty-seven-year-old Reuben Allen enlisted on July 7, 1861 in Company C of the Ninth Louisiana Infantry, which fought with the Army of Northern Virginia primarily in the war's eastern theatre.<sup>11</sup> He began as a first sergeant and rose to the rank of captain in April 1862, a rank he held for the war's remainder.<sup>12</sup> He did not survive the war and

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<sup>6</sup> "William H. Pierson," Ancestry.com, *1850 United States Federal Census*; CPI Inflation Calculator, accessed November 8, 2021, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1850?amount=6000>.

<sup>7</sup> Cutrer and Parrish, "Introduction," in *Brothers in Gray*, 2n4; CPI Inflation Calculator, accessed November 8, 2021, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1860?amount=30000>.

<sup>8</sup> George Rable, *Damn Yankees! Demonization and Defiance in the Confederate South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 24-25; Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 15, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 224.

<sup>9</sup> Cutrer and Parrish, "Introduction" in *Brothers in Gray*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Cutrer and Parrish, "Introduction" in *Brothers in Gray*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> "R. Allen Pierson," Civil War Service Records (CMSR), Confederate – Louisiana, Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Louisiana, compiled 1903 - 1927, M320, National Archives, Washington, D.C., accessed via Fold3.com on November 12, 2021; Cutrer and Parrish, "Introduction," in *Brothers in Gray*, 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Cutrer and Parrish, "Introduction," in *Brothers in Gray*, 8.

was killed in a small skirmish “by a Minnie ball from the yankee sharpshooters,” as his cousin relayed, at Snicker’s Gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains on July 18, 1864.<sup>13</sup>

The Pierson family’s correspondence was published by Louisiana State University Press in 1997. Reuben Allen Pierson wrote about seventy-three out of 133 letters in the published collection. His writing reflects a high level of education and a degree of eloquence, as he attended Mount Lebanon University and worked as a schoolteacher in the community before the war.<sup>14</sup> Most of the letters that survive are written to his father, William H. Pierson, his younger brother, James F. Pierson, and his younger sister, Mary Catherine Pierson.<sup>15</sup> None of Reuben Allen’s letters have been publicly digitized. The letter collection resides in the Rare Books, Manuscripts, and University Archives of Howard-Tilton Memorial Library at Tulane University.<sup>16</sup>

### **Honor, Manhood, and Duty: Reuben Allen Enlists**

When Reuben Allen enlisted, he presented two different pictures of his new camp life to his sister and father. In his letter to his sister, he complained about the camp’s conditions and wrote rather bluntly, but with his father, he brushed aside his troubles. In a letter to Cassie Pierson on June 20, 1861, he asserted, “The camp is one of the filthiest places I have ever been permitted to see,” remarking how “the flies are so thick until you have to be careful in carrying a mouthful from your plate to your mouth lest a fly should alight upon it.”<sup>17</sup> He was disgusted by

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<sup>13</sup> Phillip Collins to William H. Pierson, July 28, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 241; Cutrer and Parrish, “Introduction,” in *Brothers in Gray*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Cutrer and Parrish, “Introduction” in *Brothers in Gray*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Note: This paper will retain the original spelling and grammar of Reuben Allen Pierson’s correspondence.

<sup>16</sup> Cutrer and Parrish, “Introduction” in *Brothers in Gray*, xii.

<sup>17</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, June 20, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 22.

the living conditions, which did not fit with his expectations. He then added that “there is nothing that a man cannot accustom himself to,” trying to resign himself to acceptance of his situation.<sup>18</sup> Switching topics, he affirmed his belief in the Confederate cause for “Justice and Liberty.”<sup>19</sup> The letter is an incomplete fragment, and perhaps he discussed other topics, but his complaints show a sharp contrast to a letter to his father, written only one day later. In the letter to his father, he changed his tone to one of optimism, writing in his opening lines how “we had quite a pleasant trip down and all the boys are as jovial as a party of youths at a wedding.”<sup>20</sup> His word choice reads as an odd description for a body of men preparing for war. He added, “Everything is not so bad down in this camp as has been represented,” as he proclaimed his camp as “the prettiest ground on the encampment.”<sup>21</sup> His misrepresentation of the camp revealed that for whatever reason, he felt comfortable in describing his bleak living situation to his sister, but not to his father. Reuben Allen also assured his father that “it is now believed by many of the soldiers that the war will close by fall.”<sup>22</sup> He purposefully depicted an agreeable setting to his father, perhaps hoping that his father would rest easy knowing that nothing was amiss, and that he would soon return home, safe and sound. He suppressed his feelings of disgust to his father whereas with his sister, he may have hoped for her sympathy and subsequent appreciation for his sufferings as a soldier.

Scholars have examined how Confederate soldiers expressed and controlled their emotions within a culture that emphasized honor, manhood, and bravery. James Broomall

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<sup>18</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, June 20, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, June 20, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, June 21, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, June 21, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, June 21, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 24-25.

illustrates how Southern men were taught to rein in their emotions.<sup>23</sup> As with Reuben Allen's letters, Confederate men confined themselves to admitting their feelings only through diaries, letters, or to their comrades, who understood their pains better than civilians.<sup>24</sup> Broomall asserts that a diary, as a private document, allowed men to open up fully about the war.<sup>25</sup> As seen with Reuben Allen's correspondence, the writer can change experiences in a letter to what the recipient wants to hear, and as Broomall argues, men like Reuben Allen could not always write freely when the Southern culture of masculinity expected them to bury their feelings.<sup>26</sup> Stephen Berry writes that Southern men "were encouraged to swallow half of these emotions and exaggerate the remainder," offering another reason why Reuben Allen minimized his sufferings to his father.<sup>27</sup> He exaggerated the Confederate army's health and morale and Union battle casualties in his letters, trying to prove to himself and his family that the Confederacy would prevail.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in accordance with this scholarship, Reuben Allen too demonstrated this struggle to share his emotions and experiences, especially among different family members.

Scholars have also studied how cultural notions of honor and manhood influenced Confederate soldiers. Reuben Allen often emphasized duty, honor, and sacrifice as characteristics of the ideal Southern man and soldier.<sup>29</sup> In his studies of Southern culture and honor, Bertram Wyatt-Brown concluded that honor encompassed self-sacrifice for the

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<sup>23</sup> James Broomall, *Private Confederacies: The Emotional Worlds of Southern Men as Citizens and Soldiers* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Broomall, *Private Confederacies*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Broomall, *Private Confederacies*, 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> Broomall, *Private Confederacies*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen W. Berry II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, March 28, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 230-231; Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. July 15, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 203.

<sup>29</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, August 25, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 47-48; Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 228-230.



Confederacy and local community. It also included the use of violence to reaffirm the Southern social and racial hierarchy, all of which Reuben Allen claimed to fight for.<sup>30</sup> As Wyatt-Brown argues, Reuben Allen's letters accordingly demonstrate that he went to war to defend his family and the honor of the South, a defense of the status quo.<sup>31</sup> If the Confederacy won, he expected to maintain his position as an elite, powerful man of the South. Jason Phillips adds that Confederate soldiers saw themselves as nobler and braver than their Union counterparts, a belief which Reuben Allen often repeated.<sup>32</sup> Even after the disastrous defeat at Gettysburg, he still insisted that the Confederates were "superior in valor."<sup>33</sup> Edward Ayers writes that "the ultimate protection of honor lay in physical courage," a characteristic important to Reuben Allen and other Southern men.<sup>34</sup> When Reuben Allen bragged about his and his comrades' courage, he affirmed these ideas about honor, manhood, and bravery.

Reuben Allen fiercely defended his character to his family and wished more Southern men would follow his example. After the loss at Gettysburg and the fall of Vicksburg, Mississippi, he still believed in Confederate victory. He admitted that while "some few may grow faint hearted," he asserted, "most of the men of the South will die in preference" to surrendering to "King Abraham," or President Lincoln.<sup>35</sup> In another letter in February 1862, he sneered at the soldiers who had to leave the army, disparaging those "timid and hysterical boys

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<sup>30</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 285.

<sup>31</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. January 30, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 227.

<sup>32</sup> Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 206.

<sup>34</sup> Edward L. Ayers and Charles Reagan Wilson, "Honor," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* 13, ed. Nancy Bercauw and Ted Ownby, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 134, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616728\\_bercauw](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616728_bercauw).38.

<sup>35</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, July 19, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 204.

who cannot scarcely live for the thoughts of mama.”<sup>36</sup> By characterizing these boys as weak and feminine, he showed that the soldiers who could not withstand the camp life were unworthy to be called men and were dishonorable. Southern honor also dictated that men should die on the battlefield rather than accept defeat. As Reuben Allen proclaimed, “Sooner would I die and leave my bones to bleach in the sunshine on the battle plains of the state of La.” than to allow his family to be “insulted by the brutish and inhuman wretches” of the North.<sup>37</sup> He penned this letter in April 1864, fiercely refusing to abandon his commitment to the South even as Louisianans’ desertion increased towards the war’s end.<sup>38</sup> Earlier in the war, he insisted that he had no other choices except to “die a soldiers death or live a freemans life.”<sup>39</sup> Jason Phillips characterizes such sentiments as representative of “diehard” rebels who believed in the Confederate army’s “invincibility,” in that the Confederacy could never be defeated.<sup>40</sup> These staunch rebels resolved to fight until the end. They could not foresee a future with the North after so many of their comrades had died, a sentiment that Reuben Allen shared.<sup>41</sup> Reuben Allen, in his vows to do or die, demonstrated an unflinching determination to defend the Confederacy.

Although he insisted that he would die for the Confederate cause, a careful examination of Pierson’s letters reveals that he sought to protect his family from the death and grief that ravaged his company. In an August 1861 letter, Reuben Allen felt compelled to shield his brother, James, only about sixteen years old, from the war.<sup>42</sup> He began his letter by detailing the sickness that had swept through his company, writing, “We have only had 16 or 18 men to

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<sup>36</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, February 2, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 78.

<sup>37</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, April 19, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 233.

<sup>38</sup> Ethel Taylor, “Discontent in Confederate Louisiana,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 2, no. 4 (1961): 421-424, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4230635>.

<sup>39</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 31, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 77.

<sup>40</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 41.

<sup>42</sup> Cutrer and Parrish, “Introduction” in *Brothers in Gray*, 10.

drill.”<sup>43</sup> Reuben Allen asserted bluntly that his brother would not “stand the hardships of a campaign than fire would burn under water.”<sup>44</sup> He felt that “as an honest brother, as a true friend I must say to you, if you are tired of life, if you prefer death, ah the most horrible of deaths—if this be your fancy, then I (though it be with reluctancy) say go on and join the army.”<sup>45</sup> Reuben Allen’s careful phrasing showed a keen effort to deter James, as he saw that many of his comrades died ingloriously of disease rather than from an honorable stand on the battlefield. He concluded his letter by tersely naming his regiment’s dead, writing, “Frank Long died this week” and “I heard from Perry Mathews day before yesterday. He has been given out by all the doctors. I expect he is dead.”<sup>46</sup> He tried to scare James from enlistment, knowing that death could easily come for his brother too. A month later, Reuben Allen had “been confined to my bed for about four weeks with typhoid fever,” and instructed his father, “Tell Jim that if he could see the sick who are in the hospital here he would not feel so much like coming to war.”<sup>47</sup> A sixteen-year-old boy, far from being “a stout hearty robust man,” had no place in the war.<sup>48</sup> Writing to his sister-in-law in August 1862, Reuben Allen again deplored the loss of life. He did not wish to face the relatives of the dead, as confronting them was “more trying than to face the battle’s rage.”<sup>49</sup> He solemnly wrote, “I sometimes think that I shall never desire to return home on account of the many bereaved.”<sup>50</sup> Even so, he tried to dismiss his distress by asking, “Who would not die in a

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<sup>43</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, August 15, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 38.

<sup>44</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, August 15, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, August 15, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 38.

<sup>46</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, August 15, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, September 18, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 48.

<sup>48</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, August 15, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 38.

<sup>49</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson [Charity Pierson], August 3, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 109-110.

<sup>50</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson [Charity Pierson], August 3, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 109.

cause which the ladies all look upon as glorious.”<sup>51</sup> Yet he remained troubled, writing how so many of his comrades were buried “with nothing but the head boards to tell who lies beneath.”<sup>52</sup> Although he insisted that it was honorable to die for the Confederacy, he knew that death itself was less glorious than he had imagined.

Despite his efforts to deter his brother from enlistment, Reuben Allen reserved his harshest criticism for draft dodgers and deserters. He called out men who avoided military service in a letter to his father on January 31, 1862, predicting that they would be “looked upon as base cowards unworthy the name of southern man.”<sup>53</sup> They were “unworthy” to be called men because they shirked from military duty and ignored that “the blood of their ancestors” had been shed for “that rich legacy bequeathed to them.”<sup>54</sup> By referring to the “blood of their ancestors,” he believed that the Confederates, in their fight for independence, continued the work of their Revolutionary War ancestors.<sup>55</sup> In a January 1864 letter to his father, he asserted, “All the boys are in fine health and cheerful spirits.”<sup>56</sup> But he added he had heard news that other local Louisiana men had deserted, which “of course grieves us very much,” because he wished he could “set before them a good and noble example of unselfish devotion to the cause.”<sup>57</sup> He asked, “Who would not protect an aged parent or a loving sister from the abuses of the rabble?”<sup>58</sup> He struggled to understand their motivations, interpreting military duty as intertwined with the

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<sup>51</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson [Charity Pierson], August 3, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 111.

<sup>52</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson [Charity Pierson], August 3, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 109.

<sup>53</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 31, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 77.

<sup>54</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 31, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 31, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. January 30, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 226.

<sup>57</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. January 30, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 226.

<sup>58</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. January 30, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 227.

defense of the family. To Reuben Allen, Confederate deserters abandoned their comrades and left their families at the mercy of Union troops.

As a wealthy slaveholder, he also did not understand why men of poorer means would abandon the army to return home. Even Reuben Allen admitted in October 1862 upon the inconsistency of his pay, as he complained, “I have not been paid off since May and the Government is now due me six hundred and fifty (\$650) dollars.”<sup>59</sup> When he was killed in July 1864, he “had no money except two dollars in gold and ten cts. in silver,” and he was due “about seven hundred dollars” by the Confederate government.<sup>60</sup> A bachelor with no children, he had once declared, “I am but an individual, have no family or relatives that would suffer for bread should my life be sacrificed in the struggle.”<sup>61</sup> Clearly he had amassed such wealth that he was able to forgo his pay for some time.

Historians have demonstrated that class differences affected Southern morale and motivation to a certain extent. Middle and lower class soldiers had wives and children who depended upon their pay. They could not live with the long pay delays that Pierson could temporarily afford. According to Ethel Taylor, Louisiana soldiers began deserting in droves after the surrender of Vicksburg in mid-1863, and the remaining soldiers’ hardships multiplied with the arrival of cold weather.<sup>62</sup> Overall desertion rates once indicated that about 5,000 Louisianans left the army, but Taylor asserted that many more thousands abandoned the front, naming one report that at least 8,000 men deserted.<sup>63</sup> Jason Phillips also notes that in 1864, the Confederate army ran low on supplies and food, and it subsequently cut soldiers’ allotment of pork to a mere

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<sup>59</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, October 1, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 128.

<sup>60</sup> Phillip L. Collins and F. A. Bledsoe to William H. Pierson, July 28, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 241.

<sup>61</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 31, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 77.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, “Discontent in Confederate Louisiana,” 421-422.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, “Discontent in Confederate Louisiana,” 420.

“half a pound,” with no luxury items like coffee or sugar.<sup>64</sup> Reuben Allen commented on the small rations, writing that the men “get ¼ pound of bacon or 1 pound of beef; and 1 pound of flour per day which you know is a very slim allowance for a stout hearty man.”<sup>65</sup> He maintained that the men “are in excellent health,” despite admitting that “many of them are as good as barefooted.”<sup>66</sup> He seems to contradict himself in the army’s true health and spirit, perhaps reluctant to confess that anything was amiss. Aaron Sheehan-Dean writes that in addition to socioeconomic differences, many other factors influenced desertion, including limited rations, camp life, military failures, and conditions at home.<sup>67</sup> However, he does not discuss the financial burdens upon less well-to-do Confederate soldiers, and his study is limited to Virginians.<sup>68</sup> Despite the many strains upon Confederate soldiers, Reuben Allen grew angry over increasing desertion. “I have no sympathy with skulkers and cowards,” he declared in January 1864.<sup>69</sup> He damned them, writing, “Let such an one die for he is unworthy the blessings of his Creator.”<sup>70</sup> He could not see eye to eye with them, as he interpreted his sufferings as all for the cause, enjoyed a comfortable financial position, and had no dependents. As Reuben Allen saw it, desertion was sinful and shameful, especially as the situation grew bleak for the Confederacy.

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<sup>64</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 78.

<sup>65</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 5, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 220.

<sup>66</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 5, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 220.

<sup>67</sup> Aaron Sheehan-Dean, “Justice Has Something to Do with It: Class Relations and the Confederate Army,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 113, no. 4 (2005): 344-345, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4250281>.

<sup>68</sup> Sheehan-Dean, “Justice Has Something,” 343-344.

<sup>69</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. January 30, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 227.

<sup>70</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. January 30, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 227.

## **Southern Propaganda: Reuben Allen's Contempt for Northern "Yankees"**

Southern propaganda further fueled Reuben Allen's hatred of Northerners. In examining the role of Southern propaganda, historians have concluded that Southern demonization of Northerners and harsh political rhetoric sharply increased regional divisions. As Elizabeth Varon argues, Southerners and Northerners employed inflammatory language to paint each other as radicals, accusing the other of threatening the country's ruin and disunion.<sup>71</sup> Reuben Allen characterized all Northerners as "inhuman fanatics" bent upon abolition and rule over the South.<sup>72</sup> George Rable agrees with Elizabeth Varon but adds that Southerners seemed especially bent on their hatred.<sup>73</sup> He notes that Southern newspaper editorials and articles deepened such contempt towards the North.<sup>74</sup> Reuben Allen was college-educated, and perhaps he gleaned some of his political ideas from his family, friends, and newspapers. He mentioned Northern and Southern newspapers in several letters. In a letter to Mary Catherine Pierson, he mentioned an article about soldiers' aid organizations in a local Louisiana paper.<sup>75</sup> After the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, he referenced reading Northern papers, writing how they "estimate the loss on their own part at from 30 to 50 thousand."<sup>76</sup> As Elizabeth Varon and George Rable have suggested, newspapers and popular rhetoric likely helped cement his ideas about Northerners and the South's right to independence.

Reuben Allen also saw himself and his fellow Southerners as superior to the Northern people and their beliefs. As Eugene Genovese has demonstrated, Southerners contrasted their

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<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 13-15.

<sup>72</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, January 24, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 73.

<sup>73</sup> Rable, *Damn Yankees!*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Rable, *Damn Yankees!*, 5-6.

<sup>75</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 5, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 35-36.

<sup>76</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, July 19, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 204.

morality and their “progressive” system of slavery against radical Northern abolitionists.<sup>77</sup> They believed that their system of slavery was moral in comparison to the plight of Northern wage laborers, where the labor bosses abused and swindled them.<sup>78</sup> Southern clergymen added to this perception of superior morality, citing biblical passages that seemingly endorsed slavery.<sup>79</sup> Reuben agreed with popular Southern depictions of the Northern people and wrote with evident disgust how he could never seek “a union with a people who condescend to equalize themselves with the poor, ignorant & only half civilized negro.”<sup>80</sup> As a slaveholder, he feared growing Northern support for freedom and rights for African Americans, and he determined to avoid reunification with the “fiendish barbarians” of the North.<sup>81</sup> He condemned Northerners as immoral and wrote that God “is sending a just punishment upon them for their wickedness in waging war upon an unoffending country.”<sup>82</sup> According to Jason Phillips, Reuben Allen’s assertion that Northerners were wicked became a common sentiment among Confederate soldiers.<sup>83</sup> They believed that God was on the side of the Confederacy, a view which Reuben Allen shared.<sup>84</sup> George Rable adds that Southerners represented Northerners as a greedy, godless people, and thus, Southerners felt even more isolated from Northern society.<sup>85</sup> Reuben Allen accepted this view of Northerners, writing in 1863 how he hoped the war would be over soon

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<sup>77</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders’ Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>78</sup> Genovese, *The Slaveholders’ Dilemma*, 16-18.

<sup>79</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 4-5.

<sup>80</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 228.

<sup>81</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 228.

<sup>82</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, November 26, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 66.

<sup>83</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 6.

<sup>84</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 6.

<sup>85</sup> Rable, *Damn Yankees!*, 7-8.



and “our enemies will then return to their idols and continue to worship the almighty dollar.”<sup>86</sup> Reuben Allen accordingly fits with Rable’s studies, as Reuben cast Southerners as “a Christian people” whom God would not allow “to be overcome by a cruel Tyrant,” President Abraham Lincoln.<sup>87</sup> He remained convinced of God’s approval of the virtuous South.

Reuben Allen, like most Confederate soldiers, saw their fight as a continuation of the independence begun by their ancestors of the American Revolution. As Jason Phillips notes, many Confederates connected their hard times to that of the revolutionaries’ fight against the British.<sup>88</sup> Confederates likened Northerners to the tyrannical British of the American Revolution. Reuben Allen grew so hateful of Northerners that he declared them to be “unworthy of the honorable and once proud name of Americans.”<sup>89</sup> He believed that he fought for independence, “Justice and Liberty,” the same ideals that the Americans fought for against the British.<sup>90</sup> Although he insisted he fought for freedom, he kept people enslaved. However, he did not treat or respect the people he enslaved as human beings.<sup>91</sup> He also tried to dismiss the Confederates’ troubles by referencing the revolutionaries’ struggles in August 1863, writing, “Our fore fathers endured the revolution for 7 years under far more advantages than we have to endure.”<sup>92</sup> In January 1864, he repeated that their ancestors had struggled so “that we may be a free nation.”<sup>93</sup> It was left to Confederate soldiers to continue their fight so “that we may hand down to our posterity a government unsubdued by our cruel enemies.”<sup>94</sup> He perceived himself as a

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<sup>86</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, May 8, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 191.

<sup>87</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 15, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 224.

<sup>88</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 161; Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 142.

<sup>89</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 228.

<sup>90</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, June 20, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 23.

<sup>91</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 228.

<sup>92</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, August 22, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 210.

<sup>93</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. January 30, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 226.

<sup>94</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. January 30, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 226.

revolutionary, fighting alleged Northern injustice, although he failed to see how his cause prevented millions of enslaved people from freedom.

Reuben Allen echoed popular language that demonized Union soldiers and civilians. In his letters, he frequently used the word, “enslave,” to describe his perception of the South’s oppression. In a letter to his father in August 1863, Reuben Allen vowed, “God will never suffer a determined and united people to be enslaved.”<sup>95</sup> It was peculiar language to use when, as a slaveholder, he did not recognize himself as an oppressor. In an April 1864 letter, as news reached him of Union campaigns in Louisiana, he prayed “that the soil of Bienville Parish may never be polluted by the foot of one of the heartless wretches who are striving to enslave us.”<sup>96</sup> To him, the Union soldiers were a foul and unchristian people, ruining the Southern land’s sacredness. According to George Rable, many white Southerners echoed this idea that Northerners would enslave them. They feared that their enslaved people would be freed and that white Southerners would switch places with them, falling to the bottom of society.<sup>97</sup> Reuben Allen vowed to fight until his death, believing that if he abandoned the army, he would allow his family to be enslaved by the “inhuman fanatics of Lincolnism.”<sup>98</sup> He also employed the commonly used phrase of Southern “subjugation,” which George Rable describes as a blanket term for Southerners’ worst horrors: the deaths of their loved ones, the rape of women, freedom for the enslaved, and U.S. military occupation.<sup>99</sup> In July 1863, Reuben Allen asserted that “most of the men of the South will die in preference to being subjugated by the merciless hordes of

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<sup>95</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, August 22, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 210.

<sup>96</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, April 19, 1864 in *Brothers in Gray*, 234.

<sup>97</sup> Rable, *Damn Yankees!*, 124.

<sup>98</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, January 24, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 73.

<sup>99</sup> Rable, *Damn Yankees!*, 118.

King Abraham.”<sup>100</sup> By use of the term, “merciless hordes,” and by his other letters describing Union soldiers, he clearly feared the worst of what the Union soldiers would do to his family and community.

As the war drew closer to an end in 1864, Reuben Allen’s contempt for Union soldiers intensified. He failed to contain his anger, especially as Union soldiers spread throughout Louisiana. In August 1863, he characterized Union soldiers as subhuman and evil, doubting whether they would be permitted entrance to hell.<sup>101</sup> He then pardoned himself in parenthesis, apologizing for his “harsh language on that subject,”<sup>102</sup> and he refrained from further expression of his hatred. However, in a March 1864 letter to his father, he could not hold back his anger. Reflecting upon the loss of two men whom he regarded as “brothers,” Reuben Allen promised that he and his surviving comrades would either “die like men or establish our independence.”<sup>103</sup> He then ranted on for several lines about “vile” Northerners and their support for African Americans’ rights. He condemned them as “unworthy of the honorable and once proud name of Americans.”<sup>104</sup> He paused, realizing he had gone a bit too far, writing, “I will not dwell upon this theme. Such thoughts are always exciting my passions for revenge and vengeance.”<sup>105</sup> However, he did return, two paragraphs later, to the subject, deploring how Louisiana civilians seemed ready to give in to “our oppressors.”<sup>106</sup> He then invoked God’s will, writing that God would help the “noble and determined” South prevail against “such a people” of the North.<sup>107</sup> By the war’s later stages, Reuben Allen, incensed by the loss of his comrades and despairing of lagging

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<sup>100</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, July 19, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 204.

<sup>101</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 207.

<sup>102</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 207.

<sup>103</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 228.

<sup>104</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 228.

<sup>105</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 228.

<sup>106</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 229.

<sup>107</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 229.

civilian support, argued fervently on the Confederacy's behalf. He implored his family to maintain their morale because he needed their help and encouragement and did not want to acknowledge that his and fellow comrades' sacrifices might have been made in vain.

Reuben Allen acted as a wing of Southern propaganda himself, often exaggerating Southern military might. In July 1861, after the Confederate victory at the Battle of First Manassas, he boasted to his father, "The Yankees got a most glorious whipping and thousands of them are yet left dying unburied on the field."<sup>108</sup> He wrote that he had conversed with "many yankee prisners," who had thought they could easily "whip" the rebels, being "told that union men were nearly equal to the secessionists."<sup>109</sup> Instead, now as defeated prisoners, "they all say that they have been duped and will not fight against us any longer."<sup>110</sup> By telling his father of this conversation, he used the alleged voices of Union prisoners to affirm the Confederates' superiority. This conversation likely did not play out exactly as he claimed, judging by the Union prisoners' uncharacteristic dialogue and word choice. The conversation also fit neatly with Pierson's and other fervent Confederates' convictions that they were "unbeatable."<sup>111</sup> In another letter in December 1863, he again emphasized the Union soldiers' inferiority and lack of bravery, writing, "We fortified our position and awaited the attack, but alas! they had not the courage to bring on the assault."<sup>112</sup> Union soldiers lacked the moral courage to fight and overcome Confederate soldiers.

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<sup>108</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, July 24, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 33.

<sup>109</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, July 24, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 34.

<sup>110</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, July 24, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 34.

<sup>111</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 2.

<sup>112</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, December 9, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 215.

## The Confederate Post

How Reuben Allen received his information also depended upon the mail cycle, which brought him papers and letters from home. In his studies of the postal system, David Henkin maintains that Americans began to depend heavily on the mail in the mid-1800s. Henkin argues that increasing literacy rates, greater access to school, lower postage costs, the expansion of transportation and the railroad systems, and the rise of the post office contributed to the growing use of mail and postal services in the mid-1800s.<sup>113</sup> As with Reuben Allen, mail delivery became crucial in wartime, as so many people relied upon letters as their sole connection to their loved ones.<sup>114</sup> The Confederate post office suffered set-backs as they struggled to manage their new system. L.R. Garrison detailed the many problems of the Confederate post office, noting transportation issues, the army's interference with the mail trains, and the loss of mail workers due to conscription.<sup>115</sup> Reuben Allen often complained about missing or delayed letters, and because he was never in one place, he often took care to tell his family where to direct their letters, whether that be a post office or to his regiment's location.

When sending mail through the army itself became difficult, Reuben Allen sent his mail by way of people leaving the camp. Military defeats or campaigns also affected the mail communication lines. When Vicksburg, Mississippi, fell to Union forces in July 1863, Confederates lost their control over the Mississippi River, making it very difficult for Reuben

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<sup>113</sup> David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 7-9.

<sup>114</sup> Henkin, *Postal Age*, 11.

<sup>115</sup> L. R. Garrison, "Administrative Problems of the Confederate Post Office Department, I." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1915): 125-127, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30234666>.

Allen, in Virginia, to get a letter through to his family in Louisiana.<sup>116</sup> He had to send his mail by couriers and wrote less frequently to his family. On August 22, 1863, he wrote to his father that a soldier in his company was heading to Mississippi on furlough and so in “hopes that he may see an opportunity of sending this beyond the river I seize the only method of writing to you.”<sup>117</sup> Writing to his sister that same month, he wrote that he had “an opportunity of sending you a letter across the Mississippi by hand.”<sup>118</sup> He had to resign himself to long silences from his family, writing in August 1863, “Well Cassie I have not heard a word from Henry, Dave, & Jimmy [his brothers] since the siege of Vicksburg.”<sup>119</sup> He then added quite bluntly, “I suppose they were captured or killed,” but he hoped to hear from them soon, although a little more than a month had passed since the fall of Vicksburg.<sup>120</sup> Letters were all he had to hear news from his family, and when lines of communication fell through, his letters showed his despair and frustration.

When Reuben Allen did not hear from his family, he felt isolated from home and angered that his family had forgotten him. In August 1861, he began, “I again take up the pen to trouble you all. I sometimes think that I write too often, but when I remember how glad I am to hear from home I think that my writing so often will only be a source of gratification to you all.”<sup>121</sup> Yet when his family neglected to write as often as he liked, or the mail was delayed, he continued to write letters but criticized his family’s silence. In January 1862, in a letter to his father, he wrote, “I have not received a single word from home in about one month, which is

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<sup>116</sup> “Vicksburg,” American Battlefield Trust, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/vicksburg>.

<sup>117</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, August 22, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 208.

<sup>118</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 206.

<sup>119</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 207.

<sup>120</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 207.

<sup>121</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, August 17, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 43.

about the longest time since I left home.”<sup>122</sup> He refrained from further reproach to his father, perhaps out of respect, but he added in a postscript, “Write oftener or make Jim and Cassie write. I would like to hear from home once a week.”<sup>123</sup> In his letter to his brother, James, Reuben Allen spoke more forcefully, as he complained, “You are certainly all very busily engaged in farming or some other occupation, which prevents you all from writing.”<sup>124</sup> Although he often claimed to be in high spirits, he clearly despaired when a long period passed without any letters. In early August 1862, he made clear how isolated he felt, writing, “I have written so many letters without receiving any replies that I have almost despaired ever hearing from home again.”<sup>125</sup> His use of “despaired” and “ever hearing” speak to the level of misery he felt from his separation. He then fell ill, and writing again to his father on August 17, he wrote that he still had not heard from him, adding, “I fear that you fail to get my letters. You must excuse me for complaining of not getting letters. I see others are receiving letters constantly.”<sup>126</sup> He carefully worded his criticism, the last line revealing his deep annoyance. In an April 1864 letter to his father, he questioned whether he should bother to write when he had not received any letters. However, he decided to try, declaring dramatically, “The path of duty is plainly before me. I ought to write to my absent father, for whose welfare and prosperity I would endure every suffering, brave every danger, and shrink not from the firey darts of wars dreadful missiles.”<sup>127</sup> He implied that his father’s obligation to write was a simple favor compared to his dangerous duties as a soldier. He nudged his father to do his duty by writing, a reminder that he had sacrificed so much for his father’s sake.

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<sup>122</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 31, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 76.

<sup>123</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 31, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 77.

<sup>124</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, February 2, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 78.

<sup>125</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, August 5, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 111.

<sup>126</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, August 17, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 117.

<sup>127</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, April 19, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 232-233.

### **A Southern Patriot: Reuben Allen Defines Women's Roles**

Reuben Allen was especially critical of his sister, Mary Catherine Pierson, or “Cassie,” disparaging her when she failed to write. He interpreted letter-writing as a duty and expected Cassie to fulfill that obligation as his sister and as a patriotic Southern woman. In a February 1862 letter to James Pierson, Reuben Allen huffed angrily in a postscript, “Tell sister I am sorry she is so pressed with duties, or her mind so engrossed with the beauty of some young lad, that she can seldom find time to write.”<sup>128</sup> Even though his other family members had neglected to write, he singled out his sister, writing, “I hope she will not forget an absent brother in so short a time.”<sup>129</sup> Just two days later, in another letter to James, he reserved harsh criticism for Cassie, instructing James to “tell sister not to be backward in taking her school. She will be much better satisfied while busily engaged than in idleness.”<sup>130</sup> Two months later, he remained annoyed at Cassie’s lack of frequent letters, beginning his letter sarcastically with “in the absence of any letter from you I again write to inform you that I am yet in the land of the living.”<sup>131</sup> He was hurt by her neglect and lashed out at her in his anger. In August 1863, he wrote to Cassie that mail communication looked “uncertain” with the loss of Confederate control over the Mississippi River.<sup>132</sup> He begged her to “write as often as you have an opportunity,” showing his desperation.<sup>133</sup> He then tried to make her feel guilty for ignoring his letters, adding that if she

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<sup>128</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, February 2, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 79.

<sup>129</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, February 2, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 79.

<sup>130</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, February 4, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 80.

<sup>131</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, April 5, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 175.

<sup>132</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 207.

<sup>133</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 208.



continued her silence, it would “be cruel.”<sup>134</sup> She did send him letters, although apparently it was not as frequent as he would have liked.<sup>135</sup> In November 1862, he reproached his sister for not writing often, musing, “I often think that I will quit writing to you as you have only written me two letters since I left in the spring. Still though I know that I should prove negligent because you are so.”<sup>136</sup> Although it remains unknown how Cassie responded to these charges, her other brother, David, predicted that she would excuse her silence by saying: ‘Pa writes you and that is enough.’<sup>137</sup> Perhaps it was a combination of her other duties, her disregard for the letters’ importance to her brothers, and mail communication issues that prompted her to send fewer letters. In March 1864, Reuben Allen again longed from a letter from Cassie, but “there are so many obstacles intervening between us.”<sup>138</sup> He struggled against his better judgment that she would not receive his letter, “yet I can never despair of hearing now and then from my home.”<sup>139</sup> Irritated by her silence, Reuben Allen frowned upon his sister’s lack of commitment to him and to the Confederacy.

Reuben Allen’s letters reveal insight into Southern standards of appropriate behavior for women, as he expected his sister to demonstrate active support for the Confederacy. As Victoria Ott notes, Southern men often instructed their younger sisters, almost from a “fatherly” attitude

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<sup>134</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 11, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 208.

<sup>135</sup> Note: Reuben Allen notes the receipt of a letter from Mary Catherine Pierson four times, specifically in the following correspondence: Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, November 23, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 63; Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, November 8, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 132; Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, April 8, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 178; Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, May 9, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 191. Reuben Allen in turn wrote at least fifteen letters to his sister between June 20, 1861, and March 28, 1864.

<sup>136</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, November 8, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 133.

<sup>137</sup> David Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, July 19, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 105.

<sup>138</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, March 28, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 230.

<sup>139</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, March 28, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 230.

instead of that of an older sibling.<sup>140</sup> Cassie Pierson was about seven years younger than her brother and would have been about 21 years old in 1861.<sup>141</sup> Although she was an adult, the age difference prompted Reuben Allen to treat her as a naïve youth. In a June 1861 letter, Reuben Allen cautioned his sister against trusting the wrong people, adding that she, as “a non-suspecting innocent woman,” could be easily misled.<sup>142</sup> He also tended to order Cassie around. In an August 1861 letter to Cassie, he demanded, “You must knit and send me 2 good strong pair of wool socks and one or 2 pair of homespun jeans pants.”<sup>143</sup> His use of “must knit and send me” showed that he expected his sister to follow this order without question. Victoria Ott adds that Southern women were expected to participate in the war effort by forming organizations to help Confederate soldiers and by sending supplies.<sup>144</sup> After ordering his sister to knit some clothes, Reuben Allen noted that he had recently read a newspaper article where Southern women formed a soldier’s aid group.<sup>145</sup> He implied that she would do well to copy these women, as “nothing would add more glory to a young ladies name.”<sup>146</sup> He followed this by commenting on the “many true patriots among the fair daughters of Virginia,” describing how they took care of wounded Louisiana men and showing Cassie what she could do to help.<sup>147</sup> When Cassie did send a pair of “nice woolen socks” in November 1862, he expressed that he “was very thankful.”<sup>148</sup> He also noted with a hint of reproach that he had read her “hastily written letter,” perhaps hinting

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<sup>140</sup> Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 24.

<sup>141</sup> “William H. Pierson,” Ancestry.com, *1850 United States Federal Census*.

<sup>142</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, June 20, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 23.

<sup>143</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 5, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 35.

<sup>144</sup> Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 5-6.

<sup>145</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 5, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 36.

<sup>146</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 5, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 36.

<sup>147</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, August 5, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 36.

<sup>148</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, November 8, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 132.

at her evident lack of care.<sup>149</sup> He wished his sister would show her support for him more clearly and follow the standards that he expected from all Southern women.

Historians have studied Southern men's expectations of women and their idolization of women as pure and idealistic. Reuben Allen's letters confirm Giselle Roberts's conclusion that Southern women were encouraged to model themselves as idols for Confederate soldiers.<sup>150</sup> Reuben Allen upheld these women to the highest standard, proclaiming, "Woman is mans Guardian angel on earth & always clings to what is right."<sup>151</sup> He saw these women as his moral compass, writing in September 1861 how one woman's "compliments were very soothing to the ear of a poor sick soldier like angels visits."<sup>152</sup> This letter illustrates Stephen Berry's argument that Confederate soldiers often romanticized women, drawing inspiration from their dreams of the perfect Southern belle.<sup>153</sup> Southern culture pushed young women to act virtuously, Victoria Ott notes, writing that they were expected to behave as saintly and obedient ladies, toiling hard for the Confederacy and its soldiers.<sup>154</sup> In one 1862 letter, Reuben Allen praised women as "the fair sex who appear to soldiers only consolation, yes his fancied angel."<sup>155</sup> He worried over the innocence and purity of Southern women, writing in one of his last letters about how he hoped no Louisiana women had resorted to prostitution. "I do abhor and detest to see a woman throw herself upon a level with the brutes," he wrote with disgust.<sup>156</sup> When women fell to prostitution,

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<sup>149</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, November 8, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 132.

<sup>150</sup> Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 4-5.

<sup>151</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, December 23, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 140.

<sup>152</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, September 18, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 49.

<sup>153</sup> Berry, *All That Makes a Man*, 46.

<sup>154</sup> Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 5.

<sup>155</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 31, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 77.

<sup>156</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to David Pierson, May 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 238.

“they are truly the lowest of Gods creation,” he concluded.<sup>157</sup> He saw Southern women as a source of pride and inspiration and could not bear to see his idols fall below his standards.

Reuben Allen insisted that he had enlisted for the sake of Southern women and applauded them when they demonstrated their Confederate loyalty. In an August 1862 letter to his sister-in-law, Reuben Allen instructed her to tell the admirable Louisiana ladies that “for them the soldier grasps his musket, faces the enemy, and risks life with all its comforts for their liberty and freedom.”<sup>158</sup> Southern women inspired him to keep fighting, as he insisted, “Who would not die in a cause which the ladies all look upon as glorious.”<sup>159</sup> In another 1862 letter, he declared that a woman’s words of support and “beauty” prompted those with even “the slightest principle of independence and manliness” to go to war, defending “those fair creatures whose whole souls and prayers are given, freely on our behalf.”<sup>160</sup> He painted these women as examples of patriotism and faithfulness. He took care to notice their actions, remarking to his sister in October 1861 how “there are a great many ladies attending to the sick and wounded soldiers, some from nearly every southern state,” demonstrating to Cassie their deep dedication.<sup>161</sup> In another letter, after disparaging men who avoided military service, Reuben Allen wrote how “even the ladies, like the heroins of Sparta” had done their part by employing “the needle, the distaff, the wheel, and the loom to aid in establishing our independence.”<sup>162</sup> The ladies had

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<sup>157</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to David Pierson, May 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 238.

<sup>158</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson [Charity Pierson], August 3, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 111.

<sup>159</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson [Charity Pierson], August 3, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 111.

<sup>160</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, January 24, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 73.

<sup>161</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, October 8, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 49-50.

<sup>162</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, February 2, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 78-79.

earned his respect, for they had provided material and moral support when some men shirked from duty.

### **Desperate Times**

Even in the harshest times, Reuben Allen defended the Confederacy and the morale of the army, especially in the war's later stages. He used to begin each letter with a list of sick men, but beginning in late 1863 and early 1864, he emphasized the health of the army as close to perfect. In August 1863, he claimed that his company was "in the best of health and can whip twice their number of yankees any day."<sup>163</sup> He sought to show his family that Confederate troops were superior and unhurt by disease or despair. In a March 28, 1864 letter to Cassie, he boasted, "The general health and spirit of this army are altogether unsurpassed by any band of soldiers that history either modern or ancient gives an account of."<sup>164</sup> In a similar letter to his father on March 22, 1864, Reuben Allen insisted, "I flatter myself that we are doing better here than any troops in the service."<sup>165</sup> His tone of optimism in later letters contrasted much with his earlier letters. In November 1861, Reuben Allen was shocked and demoralized by the number of comrades killed by disease. He had steeled himself against seeing "fields strewn with dead and groaning wounded," but he was unprepared to see the effects of disease.<sup>166</sup> Sickened by the sight of illness "devouring men as fast as coffins can be made," he shuddered and swore, "I shall

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<sup>163</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, August 22, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 209.

<sup>164</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, March 28, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 230-231.

<sup>165</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864 in *Brothers in Gray*, 229.

<sup>166</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, November 12, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 62.

never, no never forget” it.<sup>167</sup> He did not dwell upon sickness and his grief so much in the war’s later stages, as he convinced his family that the Confederacy was destined to triumph.

Some men may have fallen ill much less because of their immunity from previous sicknesses, but even so, Reuben Allen took care not to dwell upon illness in later letters. According to Kathryn Shively Meier, soldiers learned even as early as 1862 to avoid poor drinking water, keep their camps as clean as possible, and to fend for each other when ill.<sup>168</sup> Once soldiers survived the first bout of disease, they learned new habits, by their own or from each other, of how to better prevent illness.<sup>169</sup> Vaccination against certain diseases also helped soldiers survive illnesses, as Reuben Allen predicted that smallpox would “spread very slow as all the men have been well vaccinated and prepared for the disease.”<sup>170</sup> Still sickness could weigh heavily on soldier morale, as it did upon Reuben Allen, which prompted him in fall 1861 to dissuade his young brother from enlistment due to sickness and death.<sup>171</sup> In June 1863, however, he remarked to his father, “It is a very rare thing to see a man confined in bed here in camp.”<sup>172</sup> Although some men were ill, he wrote dismissively that “most of them are of naturally weak constitutions.”<sup>173</sup> He showed his father that Southern men remained undeterred from illness or poor morale, ready to fight the Union army.

He also exaggerated Union casualties to bolster his hopes of an ultimate Confederate victory. After the Confederate victory at the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, Reuben

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<sup>167</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, November 12, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 62.

<sup>168</sup> Kathryn Shively Meier, *Nature’s Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 2-3.

<sup>169</sup> Meier, *Nature’s Civil War*, 7.

<sup>170</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, December 23, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 140.

<sup>171</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, August 15, 1861, in *Brothers in Gray*, 38-39.

<sup>172</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, June 1, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 200.

<sup>173</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, June 1, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 201.

Allen proclaimed, “Our artillery slew the enemy in piles. Their whole loss is estimated at 20,000, ours not exceeding two thousand.”<sup>174</sup> In reality, the Union army suffered about 12,500 casualties while the Confederates lost about 6,000 men.<sup>175</sup> He did not reveal where he got his casualty information—perhaps he gathered his news from rumors among the soldiers or Southern newspapers which inflated the Union losses. Peter Carmichael offers one explanation in that Confederate officers, drawing from the slaveholding class, rejected their reality because they needed that reassurance that they would triumph and retain power as the elite.<sup>176</sup> Reuben Allen bragged about the army’s power and courage, and even after the disastrous defeat at Gettysburg, he still tried to spin the loss in the Confederacy’s favor. In a letter dated July 15, 1863, he claimed that the Confederates “captured over twenty thousand prisners.”<sup>177</sup> He misrepresented the number of prisoners, as the American Battlefield Trust estimates the number of captured and missing Union men to be about 5,300.<sup>178</sup> In the next letter to his father, he revised his estimates to “several thousand prisners,” and also added, “their papers estimate the loss on their own part at from 30 to 50 thousand. Our loss will fall much short of these figures.”<sup>179</sup> In a December 1863 letter, he again mentioned, “the yankee papers” which reported “that [General George] Meade has been superseded by [General Joseph] Hooker in command of the Army of the Potomac,”

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<sup>174</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to Mary Catherine Pierson, December 23, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 139.

<sup>175</sup> “Fredericksburg: Aftermath,” American Battlefield Trust, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/fredericksburg>.

<sup>176</sup> Peter S. Carmichael, *The War for the Common Soldier: How Men Thought, Fought and Survived in Civil War Armies* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 233-234.

<sup>177</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, ca. July 15, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 203. Note: Only a fragment of this letter survives, so the editors have estimated the date as circa July 15, 1863.

<sup>178</sup> “Gettysburg: Aftermath,” American Battlefield Trust, accessed October 23, 2021, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/gettysburg>.

<sup>179</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, July 19, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 204.

citing again an inaccurate report.<sup>180</sup> He avoided mentioning what Northern papers he had read, perhaps an indicator that he may have been lying to his father or misrepresenting what he had read.

It is clear that he sent and received newspapers and other print information, but his news fell along the lines of pro-Confederate propaganda. He had access to magazines and newspapers at certain times, noting in February 1863 how he had sent a Southern literary magazine, the *Southern Illustrated News*, to Mary Catherine Pierson.<sup>181</sup> In January 1864, he remarked, “We receive the Richmond papers daily and hence we keep well posted as to what is going on throughout our whole country.”<sup>182</sup> Although he kept up with the news, the Richmond papers also colored the war effort in the South’s favor. Jason Phillips notes that Confederate soldiers such as Pierson often “used hearsay, irresponsible media coverage” to support their own convictions.<sup>183</sup> Pierson’s spin on the news was driven by rumors, anti-war Northern editorials, the Southern press, and a psychological desire to repeat the intelligence that favored the Confederacy.<sup>184</sup> Perhaps he did not always fabricate his information but repeated what he read in erroneous news reports and other accounts. Sometimes Reuben Allen was left to his own experiences and bias to determine the number of casualties, and of course, Union casualties always superseded the Confederates’ losses. As in early September 1862, he admitted that he had “no idea to the number killed and wounded either side” after the Battle of Second Manassas, but he was willing to offer his own estimates. He declared, “From what I saw I am certain that the enemies loss was

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<sup>180</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, December 9, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 215.

<sup>181</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, February 2, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 154.

<sup>182</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 5, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 219.

<sup>183</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 7.

<sup>184</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 143-145.



four times that of ours.”<sup>185</sup> It seems much of his information was derived from his own experiences, rumors in camp, and newspapers.

Reuben Allen trusted in God to help the Confederacy to victory and protect him. In June 1863, he attributed his and his comrades’ safety to “the petitions of our pious” families at home.<sup>186</sup> Upon hearing news in March 1864 that Louisianans were losing hope, he reminded them that God “will never suffer a noble and determined people” of the South “to be trodden under foot.”<sup>187</sup> The “Almighty God” would help the Confederates soon secure victory.<sup>188</sup> George Rable observes that Southerners like Reuben Allen commonly appealed to God’s favor of the South, echoing their beliefs in private, in print, and in church congregations.<sup>189</sup> Reuben Allen also often mentioned his safety and his potential death in his letters, affirming his loyalty to the cause until death. He connected his Confederate service to a higher duty to God, writing, “And if I fall (which I fear but little) and my life is sacrificed upon the altar of liberty I hope I shall die happy, for no one could die in a holier or more noble cause.”<sup>190</sup> In a letter in September 1862 to James Pierson, Reuben Allen requested that his community continue praying for their welfare.<sup>191</sup> When he wondered why his life had been spared, he could only conclude that it was God’s will, “being one Who gives life and Who alone can take it away.”<sup>192</sup> In an early 1864 letter to his father, he took comfort that if he died, then one day “we may all meet” again in heaven.<sup>193</sup> After all, the God who led them had once helped “the children of Israel dry-shod through the Red

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<sup>185</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, September 7, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 120.

<sup>186</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, June 1, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 200.

<sup>187</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 229.

<sup>188</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, March 22, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 229.

<sup>189</sup> George Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 54-55.

<sup>190</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, June 1, 1863, in *Brothers in Gray*, 201.

<sup>191</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, September 7, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 121.

<sup>192</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to James F. Pierson, September 7, 1862, in *Brothers in Gray*, 121.

<sup>193</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 15, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 225.

Sea,” linking the Confederates to the plight of the Israelites and Moses.<sup>194</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust writes that like Reuben Allen, many Civil War soldiers often intertwined their faith with their military service and took solace that they would be reunited with loved ones in the afterlife.<sup>195</sup> Reuben Allen rationalized his struggles as sacrifices that God willed, taking hope that God would help them defeat the Union army.

When Reuben Allen was killed in July 1864, the two comrades who penned the condolence letter to his father praised him as an honorable and ideal Confederate soldier. One soldier, F. A. Bledsoe, described him as standing in the line of fire, “perfectly regardless of dangers,” as he directed his men.<sup>196</sup> “He was a brave officer & much beloved by his company,” Bledsoe concluded.<sup>197</sup> Pierson likely would have been pleased by this characterization. Influenced by Southern propaganda and his beliefs about honor and duty, he vowed that it was better to die in defense of Louisiana and his family than to see the North and South reunited. As the Union army gained ground in Louisiana, he grew more indignant and hateful of Northerners, believing that they threatened not only his family, but endangered the social order between themselves and their enslaved people. Reuben Allen Pierson died in what he believed was the ultimate sacrifice to the Confederacy, blinded by his loyalty and convictions until his very end.

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<sup>194</sup> Reuben Allen Pierson to William H. Pierson, January 15, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 224.

<sup>195</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 24-25.

<sup>196</sup> Phillip Collins and F.A. Bledsoe to William H. Pierson, July 28, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 242.

<sup>197</sup> Phillip Collins and F.A. Bledsoe to William H. Pierson, July 28, 1864, in *Brothers in Gray*, 242.

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