

How the Dead Kept Living: From the Battlefield to the Homefront in the American Civil War

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In America's brief history there are very few wars that have left more of an impact than that of the Civil War. When the war finally came to an end in 1865, about 620,000 lives had been lost. The massive amounts of bloodshed were unlike anything America had ever seen, unmatched to this day. It is easy to talk about the casualties like they are only numbers in a history book about days gone by; but it is a whole different matter when delving into the lives the war took, and specifically, the lives that it irrevocably changed. Especially hard is discovering the horrors that soldiers on the battlefield and women on the homefront faced every single day and the horrors they also faced even after the war was declared over. Soldiers during the war had to put up with harrowing conditions, mass violence, disease, amputations, killing, and watching their comrades be killed. Women left behind would have to face the ever-present anxiety of their loved ones never returning, threats of starvation, potential loss of their homes, and their discomfort of newly acquired independence. Women's identity would be shattered with the changes that the war brought. No longer could they be dependent upon the men in their lives as they were left with the responsibility of caring for their family and property. Civil War soldiers on the battlefield and women on the homefront in the South experienced the war in different, but equally horrifying ways. The lived experiences of individuals during this era left behind the symptoms of psychological trauma, as evidenced through the examining of letters, diaries, and newspapers.

The Civil War was not just all about battles and the generals that fought them. The war involved so much more than just that of a few great men. It involved the role of the common Civil War soldier as well— even more important than those few great leaders. In fact, to merely focus on even just the common soldier would not even begin to give the full picture of what the war was truly like or the terrors that it offered at home and abroad. One would have to consider

the other half of the population left behind while the men went off to fight. The war would also leave its mark on the women left at home.

An Identity in Flux: What Violence and Daily Struggles Bred

First, let us begin with the experience of the Civil War soldier. In Drew Gilpin Faust's *Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, she writes extensively on the physical and emotional traumas faced by the soldier every day that was new to them and the American people. The war brought about questions on religion, killing, and death for soldiers and civilians alike. It also brought up the concept of identity, particularly the loss of their identity that was often replaced with something that appeared less than human at times as bloodshed became normal and morale waned.

For the Civil War soldier, killing became a normal part of the daily grind. The nation as a whole was very religious and saw killing as one of the greatest sins a person could commit. With a staunch religious upbringing, most soldiers faced spiritual and emotional turmoil over the very idea of killing. Faust writes, "...killing violated fundamental biblical law."¹ The country very quickly had to change the rhetoric of sermons about killing in order to insure civilians and the soldier's continued, guilt-free cooperation in the war. "The North and South invoked and explored the traditional 'just war' doctrine, emphasizing that killing was not merely tolerated but required in God's service."² The very face of religion was beginning to change and with it the psyche of the soldier on the battlefield.³

¹Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2008), 33.

² Ibid, 33.

³ The Civil Religion aspect of the Civil War sheds a lot of light on the idea of a war with a just cause. While it played a key role in the psyche of the Civil War soldier and changed the rhetoric on killing, it is not the major focus of this paper. For further reading on the subject, read Drew Gilpin Faust's *The Republic of Suffering: Death in the*

Many soldiers were still considered young boys as they enlisted to fight in the war. In the early years of the war, for many green soldiers their disposition waiting for their first battles was torn between excitement and complete terror. Eric T. Dean in his article " 'A Scene of Surpassing Terror and Awful Grandeur': The Paradoxes of Military Service in the American Civil War" writes, "War reveals that the veteran's experience in warfare is paradoxical. One can be attracted to and fascinated by the very experience which can cause terror and revulsion..."⁴ Waiting for the battle became just as painful as the battle itself. When the battle finally pressed upon the young soldiers many let the overwhelming fear take them over. In *Shook Over Hell: Post Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War*, Eric T. Dean writes, "Sometimes their fear was so intense that men would fall to the ground paralyzed with terror, bury their faces in the grass, grasp at the earth, and refuse to move. Officers would scream and cajole and beat on these men...but with no effect."⁵ Usually the paralyzing fear of the soldiers would not last long. As their adrenaline started to pump and they began to fire they would immediately go into autopilot, almost machine like in their intensity. Cold and unattached were the ruling emotions of the battlefield.

Even with the change of edict involved with the idea of a just killing, many men still found the idea of killing unbearable. Faust writes, "But soldiers and even commanders still struggled with taking other men's lives."⁶ Some would only kill if it was absolutely necessary, others viewed killing as necessary only to a certain number of lives lost in battle, and a few took

American Civil War. Also, for further reading on the ministers of both the North and the South, and their change of rhetoric concerning religious matters read, *The Politics of Faith during the Civil War* by Timothy L. Wesley.

⁴ Eric T. Dean, "'A Scene of Surpassing Terror and Awful Grandeur': The Paradoxes of Military Service in the American Civil War," *The Michigan Historical Review* 21, no. 2 (1995), 41.

⁵ Eric T. Dean, *Shook Over Hell: Post-traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 54.

⁶ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 34

it even further and found killing in vengeance as cathartic. As the soldiers kept killing and seeing death on a daily basis, many lost any and all moral codes when killing was involved. Faust describes, "...vengeance came to play an ever more important role, joining principles of duty and self-defense in legitimizing violence."⁷ Many went completely insane as time progressed and the situation became even bloodier. In the middle of combat time seemed to stop and the soldier went on autopilot. Some men even described in diary entries that it was almost like their comrades had become possessed by some outside force. Faust writes about a soldier by the name of Byrd Willis who fought in the Army of Northern Virginia. Willis wrote in his diary about a horrible scene that he came across when searching for some of his comrades. He wrote in his diary, "I immediately ran up to him to ascertain when he was hurt... but upon reaching him I found that he was not hurt but was executing a species of Indian War Dance around A Poor Yankee (who was on his back in the last agonies of death) exclaiming I killed him! I killed him!"⁸ Men completely lost themselves in the act of killing, most likely in a way to cope. There were many other incidents reported that was almost an exact match to what Willis observed. It was common for the soldier to dress up and pretend to be an Indian. Becoming someone else while in the act of killing was very common and largely reported by both Union and Confederate troops. Faust concludes, "By replacing their own identities with those of men they regarded as savages, they redefined their relationship both to violence and to their prewar selves."⁹

When the men came back to themselves after the battle, for most it was a whole other story. Without the adrenaline pumping through their veins and a clear head, the soldier was met with a gruesome reality of what they had taken part in. Those that survived were left with the

⁷ Ibid, 35.

⁸ Byrd Willis, quoted in Dean's *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War*, 37.

⁹ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 35.

disturbing sight of battlefields strewn with corpses and those of the dying. Again, Faust writes on a soldier named Henry C. Taylor. Taylor wrote back to his parents after seeing such carnage:

I did not realize anything about the fight when we were in action, but the battlefield at midnight will bring one to a realizing sense of war. I never want to see such a sight again. I cannot give such a description of the fight as I wish I could. My head is so full that it is all jumbled together and I can't get it into any kind of shape...Tell Mrs. Diggins not to let her boy enlist.¹⁰

Words such as these would become more and more common as the war progressed and young soldiers came to realize the romantic notions that were taught to them about war before was very far from the reality that they would face both on and off the battlefield. All of a sudden, the concept of war being glorious and full of heroics was stripped away to reveal the more gory and grittier truth. This epiphany is littered throughout many accounts, especially in the memoir of Sam R. Watkins.

Sam R. Watkins, in his memoir entitled *Company Aytch: Or a Side Show of the Big Show*, writes about his experiences throughout the war as soldier in Company H of the First Tennessee Regiment. Sam was just an ordinary farmer that had grown up all his life in Maury County, Tennessee when the war broke out between the states. At the age of twenty-one he made the decision to enlist in the army and fight for the South. When the war is over, he publishes his memoir in 1882, telling of his experiences living through the battles of Shiloh, Chickamauga, Atlanta, and Franklin, which were arguably some of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. He sheds light on just how traumatizing the war was on those that participated. In each experience that is written down, it is impossible not to see just how distraught he was and in later accounts

¹⁰ Henry Taylor, quoted in Faust's *This Republic of Suffering*, 56-57.

just how many atrocious things begin to stop phasing him as time went on and the bloodshed worsened.¹¹

Throughout a lot of his accounts of battle, the one battle that sticks out as the hardest and bloodiest to him was the Battle of Perryville that took place in Kentucky on October 8th, 1862. He describes the Confederates and Federals as, "...surging together like the jaws of a monster vice, our regiment leading the vanguard... We did not recoil..."¹² He would continue on in the description of the battle, stating often that it had quickly turned into hand to hand fighting, that meant each regiment were pretty much on their own in the battle. Yet, as he continues his account on the Battle of Perryville, he cannot seem to stop describing the pure horror he was encountering and his reactions about his experiences. He paints the scene of the conflict, writing, "The very air seemed full of stifling smoke and fire, which seemed the very pit of hell, peopled by contending demons... The earth ran with blood. It is a known fact that this is the only battle of the war wherein men were actually killed with the bayonet."¹³ In the aftermath of the battle, Watkins echoes Henry C. Taylor with the description of how the battlefield was covered in so many bodies that both Union and Confederate soldiers could hardly be told apart.

In another battle he recounts, his details become even more gory. In the Battle at Murfreesboro, Watkins paints a horrible scene in which he is injured and the other horrific injuries he encounters at the end of the battle. In December of 1862, General Cheatham led Watkin's regiment into battle, pressing them forward like a possessed man as the Confederates fell around them like, "...leaves of autumn."¹⁴ Watkins' resolve is paramount as he does not let

¹¹ Samuel R. Watkins and Ruth Hill Fulton. McAllister, *Company Aytch, Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment, or, A Side Show of the Big Show* (Nashville, TN: Turner Publishing, 2011).

¹² Samuel R. Watkins, *Company Aytch*, 65.

¹³ *Ibid*, 66.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 84.

anything stop him as he marches forward, even when he is shot in the arm by a minnie ball which causes his limb to become paralyzed. This would have made use of the wounded arm impossible for the rest of the fight. He writes, “When I was wounded, the shell and shot that struck me, knocked me winding...I thought that it had been torn from my shoulder.”¹⁵ As the fighting began to come to an end, General Cheatham ordered him to the field hospital to get his wounded arm taken care of by a field doctor. It is here where he encounters one of the grizzliest sights of the battle. He encountered a man that was walking in the same direction as the field hospital, but as Watkins came closer, he began to notice that the soldier had a missing left arm. What Watkins writes next is revealing of just how slowly he was becoming acclimated to the horrific sights the war had to offer. He writes,

I said “Great God!” for I could see his heart throb, and the respiration of his lungs. I was filled with wonder and horror at the sight. He was walking along, when he all at once dropped down and died without a struggle or a groan. I could tell of hundreds of such incidents of the battlefield, but tell only this one, because I remember it so distinctly. ¹⁶

Would it be any wonder if this kind of carnage would at least leave some trauma in the mind of the Civil War soldier? Sam Watkins holds nothing back as he recounts the horrors that war offered daily, even outside the context of the battle. There is one more battle that sticks out in his accounts that really gives a great example as evidence towards how the battlefield would leave symptoms of a psychologically scarred mind, especially in the case of Sam Watkins.

The Battle of Jonesboro took place in Atlanta, Georgia on August 20th, 1864. After the battle, Watkins would witness death on a more personal and first-hand account while also

¹⁵ Ibid, 86.

¹⁶ Ibid, 87.

grappling with his own morality as well. Right after the battle is over, Watkins was sitting down and eating breakfast with Lieutenant John Whittaker, who was then in charge over Company H of the First Regiment of Tennessee. They had been sharing off the same plate, when Watkins hears shouts of warning from his fellow soldiers, yet before he even has time to respond, he felt a rush of air past his ear and when he turned to look at Whittaker he was shocked to discover that,

...the cannon ball knocked my hat off, and striking Lieutenant Whittaker full in the side of the head, carried away the whole of the skull part, leaving only the face. His brains fell in the plate from which we were sopping, and his head fell in my lap, deluging my face and clothes with his blood.¹⁷

Through this graphic account, Watkins shows surprising resolve, immediately stating that it was a blessing that Whittaker did not feel a thing and then moved on quickly to bury him under a nice tree surrounded by flowers. Watkins even laughs about how close he had come to death when his fellow soldiers remark on how close the cannon ball had been to taking off his face. This reaction would send up red flags to any modern-day psychologist, but within the context of the event, this incident took place towards the end of the war where death and violence would have quickly become very common and part of the daily occurrences and even expectations of the soldiers. This trend would only escalate until the war is over and even in the following years when the soldiers made their way back home.

There was more to fear than merely experiencing the agonies of battle for the common soldier. One of their worst fears was living through the battle, only to be taken as a prisoner of war. Soldiers that were subjected to these prisons rarely came out alive, and if they did manage

¹⁷ Ibid, 286.

to survive, it was a long, impossible road to recovery. Between the harsh treatment of the guards, lack of food, spreading of disease, and often times absence of any real shelter, the prison camp experience was a slow death for the prisoners of war. Curtis R. Burke, a private in company B of the 14th regiment Kentucky Calvary, would soon face the horrors of the Union run prison camps first hand.

Burke, while serving under the leadership of John Hunt Morgan in 1863, was captured by the Union after their regiment's raids in Buffington Island, Ohio. He was then sent off to a prison camp by the name of Camp Morton in Indiana. In his journal, he records his experiences within the prison. As soon as he entered the camp, what little money and supplies he had on his person were taken from him and he was given, "...only an army cracker and a small piece of fat meat each for our breakfast."¹⁸ Burke, addled and frustrated at the treatment of the Union officials, was even more appalled at where he and other prisoners were to be kept writing, "We then crossed the ditch and were quartered in two of the long one-story barracks. They were without floors. The bunks were only two deep and wide enough for three or four men to sleep in."¹⁹ Yet, an uncomfortable plank to sleep on with only one blanket to share between three men would be the least of Burke's worries as he continued to document his experiences. As time continued on, what little money or supplies they received from relatives at home started to be labeled as contraband and were sent back or went into the pockets of Union officers.

Burke was soon sent to Camp Douglas, often cited today as the "Andersonville of the North" because of its horrible conditions. Disregard for human life ran even more rampant in this prison camp In fact, it was so bad that "One prisoner in seven died, for a total of 4,200 deaths by

¹⁸ Curtis R. Burke, "Curtis R. Burke's Civil War Journal," *Indiana Magazine of History* Vol. 66, No. 2 (JUNE 1970), 113.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 114.

1865.”²⁰ Camp Douglas’ poor leadership is cited as the root cause to the death of so many prisoners. Lack of sanitation caused the spreading of diseases to be more widespread. The massive cuts on rations lead to men’s starvation. Water supplies were also deplorable, making the situation even more dire. Burke himself became ill multiple times during his imprisonment. On top of all that, he would have to consistently witness the torture of fellow inmates multiple times for trying to escape. Towards the end his time at Camp Douglas in 1864, Burke writes on his experience the past year and a half, “It seems almost a life time to look back over the many discomforts of the past year, and although I have lead a dull monotonous life yet I can recall also a few comforts for which I am thankful...”²¹ Burke’s account of his time as a prisoner of war was typical for that of the captured soldier, though he did fair better than those that did not make it out alive from Camp Douglas. The monotony, lack of proper food and sanitation, and the stints of sickness would follow him the rest of his life. Just like it would haunt many others who survived worse in the prison camps than he did.

It is not hard to see how soldiers would become numb to killing and death as the war progressed. For most, becoming numb was the only way to survive the situations they were placed in. With the sense of numb brought even more horror to the battlefield. Soldiers not only went numb, but also became complacent and bitter. As the death tolls rose the value of human life plummeted greatly. As detachment for their fellow human beings grew so did the concerns of the soldiers and country alike. Churches in the South started sending out tracts to their soldiers disparaging them from becoming vengeful and callous about killing. Faust concludes further, “Hardening represented in the eyes of the church an abandonment of the compassion that lay at

²⁰ Gary Flavion, “Civil War Prison Camps: Suffering and Survival.” Civil War Trust.

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/warfare-and-logistics/pow-camps/prison-camps.html>

²¹Curtis R. Burke, “Curtis R. Burke's Civil War Journal”, 171.

the core of human and Christian identity. Loss of feeling was at base a loss of self—a kind of living death that could make even survivors a casualty of war.”²²

While men’s identity was being reshaped under the shadow of combat, women found themselves having to pick through the rubble of their own shattered identity that the war left behind. Before, she was required to rely on the men in her life. With the majority of men away, women would have to step up to the mantle of head of household and decision making. To take it even further she would have to do everything her husband did, all during a time where threats of starvation, violence, and loss of property were at a high. All the while, women would also be worrying themselves sick over the safety and continued survival of their loved ones.

Women in the South had more to worry about than grieving the absence of their husbands and fathers while they were away fighting. She had to fear for her children and her own life as well. The violence and death tolls did not simply end where the battlefield lines were drawn. People will never truly know the exact numbers of those that died because of the Civil War. Faust explains, “War victimized civilians as well as soldiers, and uncounted numbers of noncombatants perished as a direct result of the conflict.”²³ The bloodshed and mass shortages were spreading to those who were not even involved in the war. The line between battlefield and homefront at times ceased to exist altogether, especially in the South. Reports of accidental civilian deaths from artillery shells and bullets misfiring through the walls of homes began to pile in as the war progressed. The fighting was not even between those that fought directly in the war. In places such as sections of Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia, loyalties were at times split. This caused an outbreak of guerilla warfare throughout these states. Faust reports,

²²Drew Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 60.

²³ *Ibid*, 137.

“Unionists claimed that Confederates hanged several women who refused to reveal the whereabouts of their loyal husbands.”²⁴ Yet, in the South, there was more likelihood of death from starvation than any manmade weapon. For example, in Alabama there was a petition sent out to Jefferson Davis pleading with him to acknowledge the severity of their lack of food saying, “...deaths from starvation have absolutely occurred.”²⁵ It seemed, along with loss of safety, shelter, and food, that morality was put on the backburner as civilians, especially women in the South, daily faced the repercussions of the war.

While the men were away fighting, the women that were left at home in the South had to face their own horrendous experiences. This was in large part because the majority of the whole war was fought in the southern territory. Not only was there threat of the homes of these women becoming a battleground, but the daily anxieties and struggles began to wear on their souls and their identities as women in the 19th century. Men were expected to meet the societal standards of being the master and protector, while women were to hold to the converse standards of being the subordinate, gentle, and quiet wife. The gender roles of men and women were clearly defined during this era. The lines became blurred when the war broke out. As men were called away to fight for their beliefs, women’s status changed. In *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, Drew Gilpin Faust delves into the change in identity and how women handled themselves within the angst of an identity in flux. She writes that women, “...struggled to cope with the destruction of a society that had privileged them as white yet subordinated them as female; they sought to invent new foundations for...self-worth as

²⁴ Ibid, 142.

²⁵ Jefferson Davis, quoted in Faust’s *This Republic of Suffering*, 139.

the props of whiteness, wealth, gentility, and dependence threatened to disappear.”²⁶ No longer did she have a father or husband to be a minder that made all the decisions for her. Southern women’s identity would irrevocably change as society called them to lay aside their subordinate, yielding ways and take up the mantle of head of the family, conductor of business, protector of the property, and in some extreme cases even the master.

Most women did not handle this transition well. Many of their writings would show them calling themselves worthless, useless, good for nothing, trash, purposeless, and weak. Many found themselves wishing they would have been born a man so that they would not have to be so inferior. In Faust’s book, *Mothers of Invention*, she quotes Lizzie Neblett, a mother and plantation owner, who sums up the way the majority of women viewed themselves, saying “I am so sick of doing a man’s business when I am nothing but, a poor contemptible piece of multiplying human flesh tied to the house by a crying young one, looked upon as belonging to a race of inferior beings.”²⁷

This staunch rhetoric of self-hatred is understandable when faced with their newly acquired responsibilities along with the expectations that society had previously placed on their gender role. Yet, those expectations of a woman being gentle, submissive, and confined to the private sphere were still very much alive at the same time. Actually, across the country there was much worry going on about just how involved women were becoming in the public sphere. Mary Elizabeth Massey writes in *Women of the Civil War* that, “Some critics advocated the caustic methods of a...journalist who editorialized on ‘Gynaekocracy... a disease which manifests itself

²⁶ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. (NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 7.

²⁷ Lizzie Neblett, quoted in Faust’s *Mothers of Invention*, 65.

in absurd endeavors of women to usurp the places and execute the functions of the male sex.”²⁸

It is no mystery why women were so internally conflicted. Society was telling women to support their husbands by taking over the duties of providing and protecting the family interest, while at the same time condemning them by even daring to step out of their societal role to accomplish said duties.

Economically the South was in dire states as the war began to progress and aggression heightened. Again, while the North still did suffer economic issues as cost of living started to rise, the South’s situation was a lot more destitute. How could this be? The North had their factories, but the South had easier access to food because most lived on or near farms. Common sense dictates that the North would have more food shortages and a harder time obtaining food. In her book, Massey gives insight into the main reasons, writing, “Confederate money depreciated to the point of being worthless...prices were much higher than in the North, scarcities plagued all housewives...”²⁹ As the potential for battle grew, fighting spread onto the farms, destroying much needed food sources. Even the wealthiest in the South had to tighten their belts when food became more scarce as their farms and plantations became potential battlegrounds. Emma LeConte, a teenager who experienced the war in Columbia, North Carolina, writes in her diary, “We live tolerably poorly. Two meals a day. Two plates of bread for breakfast, one of wheat flour as five bags of flour were recently made a present to us else we would only have corn bread.”³⁰ What made the situation in the South even more dire than that of the North was the lack of good paying jobs. In the cities, women found these jobs a lot

²⁸ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 153-154.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 198.

³⁰ Emma LeConte, Earl Schenck Miers, and Anne Prior Scott, *When the World Ended: The Diary of Emma LeConte* (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1987), 17.

easier throughout the war, but in the Confederacy especially among the rural areas lack of jobs and lack of income would lead to starvation.

So, women had no choice but to go outside the domestic sphere even more than she already was. In order to feed her family and hold onto her property, many women had to find ways to make money. In fact, "...the women in this group were among the hardest working and the longest suffering anywhere."³¹ Women, from both the rich, middle, and poor classes, would find themselves at various points during the war having to contend with the fact that at one point or another they would have to get creative in order to keep her family afloat. This would involve in most cases getting employment, working their own fields, and making the majority of their clothes. While many of these women took to their tasks as dutiful mothers and sisters were prone to do, many women in their diaries would again experience that self-hatred paired with an immense purposelessness. Emma LeConte writes again, "How dreadfully sick I am of this war...No pleasure, no enjoyment—nothing but rigid economy and hard work—nothing but the stern realities of life...We have only the saddest anticipations and the dread of hardships and cares..."³² Likewise, Lucy Virginia French, an author and poetess in McMinnville, Tennessee, writes,

I do so want to improve myself some during all these years that we are compelled to live under the clouds of war, & if possible to do something which will be of some service to us hereafter. But yet I almost despair of being able to accomplish anything my time is so occupied & my head so worried about things that are necessary to keep body & soul together.³³

³¹ Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 198.

³² LeConte, *The Diary of Emma LeConte*, 21.

³³ Lucy Virginia French, (Sunday Evening 8th Jan. 1865), 1825-1881, VII-M-2, m. 1816, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 176.

Women were not content with the way they were meant to serve their country. While their loved ones bled openly on the battlefield, they were left behind. They may have had much more responsibility and many more people depending on them, but at the same time the women in the south struggled with the uselessness they felt in regards to their patriotic duties. Faust writes, “In these painful feelings of uselessness lay the seeds of women’s wartime transformation grounded in demeaning sentiments of self-loathing directed against both their individual selves and the female sex.”³⁴

Women would frequently write about the news they received about the battles fought and their outcomes. Southern women especially seemed to take enormous pride in the Southern cause and for the Confederates, both when they won and when they lost. Through the loss of so many battles there would be a common trend of immense sadness for their cause as well. So, not only were they looking for ways to become more involved in the war, but they were constantly on the edge of their seat awaiting news of the results of many battles. In some cases, women began to see generals like Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee as glorious heroes. Especially with their reactions to the death of Jackson, in some diaries women are beside themselves in grief over his passing and what it meant for the Confederate cause. This grief becomes all the more visceral as Nannie E. Haskins writes about her emotions surrounding his death.

Nannie E. Haskins, later Williams, was born in Clarksville, Tennessee and that is where she spent the majority of the Civil War. She began to keep a diary of her experiences in 1863, mainly because she wanted to record it for herself to read after the war was over. Throughout the whole of her diary, she does not stray from continuously writing about the Confederate troops

³⁴ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 20.

and the battles that are fought, especially concerning Stonewall Jackson. She would end up even naming her horse after Jackson, writing on February 16th, 1863, just after the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson, "...among the latter was my beautiful 'gallant grey' 'Stonewall Jackson', he was a present to me from Pa, I thought a great deal of him because he was all my own..."³⁵ Nannie would occasionally bring Jackson up as she continued writing, but it would not be until his death that the true extent of her hopes she placed on him was acknowledged.

In May of 1863, Nannie becomes distraught when she hears rumors from the Union officers that Stonewall Jackson had been killed. She immediately entrusts her dark feelings to her diary, writing:

I never felt as sad in all my life... I felt miserable as if I could shut myself up in some dark place, where I could see no one and there cry, weep, mourn until the war was over, but now my heart rebels, I feel as if I could fight myself, never see a Yankee but[sic] What I roll my eyes, grit my teeth, and almost shake my fist at him, and then bite my lip involuntarily and turn away in disgust _ God save us!³⁶

She is obviously disheartened and angered by what the war had taken away, but in particular in what the Union had taken away. She would not be the only women who would react almost violently to the "Yankees" that had invaded their land and homes, all the while killing their loved ones and leaders. It was in this vein that many women would begin to try and find their voice, even if it was only in the pages of her diaries and letters. With their change in identity, they felt the need to do anything they could to help their loved ones that were away fighting and the South they loved and cherished almost as much. It comes to no surprise then that they would have to confront those feelings of inadequacy more and more as news would

³⁵ Nannie E. Haskins Diary, 1863-1917, XIV-C-3, Box 1, Folder 8, Tennessee State Library and Archives, (February 16th 1863).

³⁶ Ibid, Diary entry written in May of 1863.

continue to pile in, showing just how unprepared they all were at the consequences they were facing.

One of the most obvious daily agonies for women was the constant anxiety of a loved one that was away fighting. On top of all the new responsibilities women had to face, their most important role in society's eyes was supporting their men while they were away fighting. This support meant that women would have to constantly hold back their fears, sorrows, and angers from their husbands. Being emotional would only distract them from their duty. Burying their emotions deep within them would be yet another sacrifice they would have to make for their country, and more often than not willingly be a detriment to themselves.

Yet, even though they were encouraged to hide away their emotions about their loved ones and the results of the war, many wrote their feelings of despair in letters and diaries in order to help them process as best they could. Today, many psychologists and counselors attribute the writing of one's emotions down as cathartic and one of the best methods of working through debilitating emotions. The women of the 19th century may not have known about these modern methods, but they wrote just the same. Words such as "blues", "painful", "suffering", "speechless agony", "anger", "torture", "anxieties", "poor heart", "sorrow", "misery", "forlorn", "resigned", "unprotected", "afraid", "distressed", "miserable", "unbearable," and "powerless" littered various writing of women in the south. The emotions these women repeatedly described in various sources may not be able to prove that these women suffered from mental illness, but it

absolutely could point to the underlying symptoms of anxiety, depression, and in extreme cases even PTSD.³⁷

In one particular case study, Rachel Carter Craighead was a rich and educated woman who meticulously documented the experiences she had and the daily struggles she faced living in Nashville during the Civil War years. When war broke out, she had to face the harsh reality that the status quo was about to disappear and it would leave her irrevocably changed. Throughout her entries, she goes from the lap of luxury to a woman who was constantly sorrowful, angry, and bitter. Her descriptions of what life entailed before and after an Union occupied Nashville and her emotions dripping from every word creates a more in depth picture of just what some women in Nashville were facing and how they handled their massive shift in identity and lack of safety.

In analyzing her entries, it was hard not to miss just how much Rachel was affected by the mass amounts of bloodshed that covered these years. Especially in that of the injury and the death of her brother, John. John Carter was a Sargent Major with the 1st Tennessee regiment. He was wounded at the Battle of Perryville. He would later die only mere miles from the battlegrounds in Kentucky with his family standing vigil throughout his suffering. In her diary entry about her brother's injury from fighting in Perryville, she discusses the various tasks she would do in order to aid her dying brother and the agony that she faced as she saw him in mass amounts of pain. Her mother forced her to accept the reality that he would not survive. He was constantly in and out of a fevered state and the fluctuation caused him to have mood swings. Rachel, when faced with the idea of her brother dying, writes, "I feel like it would kill me. Never

³⁷ These frequently-used words came up through a lot of the case study work of Drew Gilpin Faust in her book *Mothers of Invention: Slaveholding Widows in the American Civil War*. I also found similar word use in my own case study work.

to see him again. Great God Almighty, let this cup pass from me. May it be thy will to restore my dashing Brother to me again.”³⁸ If there was any doubt that these words that Rachel had written may have been an exaggeration, then it would have been discarded as she wrote of her following experiences caring for her quickly failing brother. As her entries went on, her thoughts become more dark and hopeless. As his pain worsened and he entered the agonies of death where no one could help him or console him, Rachel again writes, “We are all heart broken, heart broken. He has said so many sweet things to us, during the last few days. He has kissed us so many times, and said God bless us, and good bye.”³⁹ He died shortly thereafter. Rachel was beside herself in grief. Right after she witnessed his death, she wrote in anguish, “What a wilderness will life be these long, long dreary days, to us and what is there beyond. Nothing but desolation. Oh! They have killed my only Brother. Our dear soldier boy. I feel like I must die too.”⁴⁰ In her later entries, she would never stray far from the memory and the grief of a lost brother. It would color everything she did for the rest of her life.

While Rachel does go on to write about her daily life, she cannot go an entry without once recalling what she lost when her brother parted the earth. It was not uncommon for her to write things such as, “I felt I would give my life to hear him call me Sissie kiss me - but Ill never, never hear that loved voice again. We like all, afflicted, think no sorrow is like our - sorrow - the only son & my only Brother oh! Its too hard to handle...”⁴¹ In later entries, she would hail the passing of time in relation to her brother’s death, writing, “Its ninty three weeks at 4 oclock since we stood around the death bed of my preacious, my only Brother.”⁴² Every moment that passed

³⁸ Rachel Carter Craighead diaries 1855-1911, January 17, 18th of 1863, Box 1, Stack 2, no. 89-92 my .661, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

was another one where her brother would never come home. As the war lingered on, so did Rachel's grief tighten.

Disease of the Body and Mind: Homesickness, Nostalgia, and Shame

While women were worrying about the potential demise of their loved ones on a war-torn battlefield, the Civil War soldier had to face the stark reality that the war did not just cut lives short through that of battle, but there were also more complicated and sinister things that could snuff their lives out over a prolonged period of agony and suffering. Just the common, battle free day life of a soldier was riddled with strife both emotional and physical. Whether it was merely walking from place to place, lack of food and supplies, or the plethora of injuries and diseases, soldiers were more than just fighting a war; they were fighting for survival.

Something that many do not often consider along with the many other plights of the Civil War soldier is the fact that they were walking constantly. Actually "constantly" is a bit of an understatement. Dean reveals about the Civil War soldier that, "He sometimes covered ten and twenty miles a day, or even more in the case of a forced march when troops had to be maneuvered quickly to come to the aid of embattled and endangered comrades or to defend key positions."⁴³ Marching that much per day added up eventually. When looking at the 11th Indiana Infantry, Dean discovered they had alone, "...marched a total of 9,318 miles; during a key three-and-a-half-month period."⁴⁴ That kind of marching on a sunny and mild day would be exhausting, but on the days where the weather was blazing hot, freezing, raining, or snowing the marching became downright fatal. There were also little to no breaks for those that could not keep up and many became ill. It was recorded that, "...many became violently ill from the

⁴³ Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 46-47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 47.

exertion, some having convulsions and others dying of heatstroke. Another soldier recalled that during such a forced march he had to stop and vomit ‘every once in a while and my head ached dreadful.’⁴⁵ According to Sam Watkins, a lieutenant in the First Tennessee Regiment, he walked in every march that his company went on until the end of the war. He writes, “I cannot remember of ever experiencing a harder or more fatiguing march...And we would wonder what all this marching was for...”⁴⁶ With so much marching, footwear became a precious commodity, especially for Confederate troops that barely had any supplies to begin with. Throughout all this the soldier barely had the chance to sleep and had to be ready to be thrown into battle at any moment, and he had to be in good fighting condition as well. It may seem hard to believe, but many Civil War veterans after the war were able to apply for pensions on the grounds of being injured by walking. Dean writes, “...veterans frequently claimed ‘sun-stroke’ and ‘hard marching’ as the basis for military disability pensions—and these claims were often granted.”⁴⁷

Along with the physical trauma that came with the daily marching, many soldiers would become sick, which was not all that uncommon anyway. Actually, the many chronic diseases that inflicted the Civil War soldier were a lot deadlier than any amount of hard marching could do. Dean writes, “Paul Steiner has noted that the Civil War was a form of ‘biological warfare’ in which several hundred thousand men died of disease...for every battle death, two men died of disease...”⁴⁸ Estimates show that around 164,000 Confederate soldiers died because of complications from disease in the war.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 47.

⁴⁶ Sam R. Watkins, *Company Aytch*, 12-13.

⁴⁷ Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 48.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 51.

Camp diseases were considered the most common. Because of the lack of sanitary conditions and knowledge on germs, the average soldier became sick during the war “four to six times.”⁴⁹ Examples of these illnesses ranged from serious conditions such as cholera, smallpox, measles, tuberculosis, and malaria to dysentery and chronic diarrhea. Actually, “...dysentery and diarrhea were the great nuisance, affecting 78 percent of the soldiers annually.”⁵⁰ While today things such as diarrhea are not seen as something serious, during the Civil War it could quickly become deadly due to the horrible conditions and the harrowing situations soldiers were constantly placed in. Without the proper treatment or medication, soldiers were pretty much out of luck the majority of the time when they became ill. Worst of all, medicine was literally taking its first baby steps into the world as a whole. The only medicine that really was around at the time was anesthesia, morphine, and opium; which were merely ways to numb the pain and not much else. Later, if the soldier managed to survive the horror show that the Civil War became, he would most likely have an addiction to the painkillers the doctors had given them during the war. With the plethora of diseases being spread and the vast lack of knowledge of doctors, it is not a shock that these circumstances made the war even darker and gave doctors an even worse reputation.

In *Soldiering in the Army of Northern Virginia: A Statistical Portrait of the Troops Who Served under Robert E. Lee*, Joseph T. Glatthaar writes on just how much statistic wise disease played a part in this particular unit in the Civil War. An interesting pattern begins to occur in the Data, Glatthaar finds that, “The median length of service prior to death from disease was 12

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

months.”⁵¹ By the second and third years of service the numbers of death from disease declines 256 percent. That is a very steep decline to imagine and an odd one to occur as well. A chart depicts these numbers in Figure 1.13 with the ratio of time served to number of deaths from disease in that period. Yet, there is a very simple explanation as to why those that served the least amount of time were more susceptible to catching diseases. Glatthaar theorizes that since in the first few years of the war there was typically less campaigning and massive stretches of fighting, that disease was shown to kill at higher rates because the lack of combat led to less deaths to attribute to being killed in battle, so a more common way to die would be to catch an illness, which makes a lot of sense.⁵² As mentioned above, the soldier did not come into this war expecting to die from diseases, but before the fighting truly began to amp up, their potential was quite a bit higher when they were not fighting day in and day out, but were constantly traveling, joining other troops from different states, and handling the lack of sanitation and food as the war continued on at a breakneck pace.

There was more to fear during the war than the enemy on the frontlines. It was the enemy of disease and injury in the camps that scared many soldiers to their core. The image of the doctor became monstrous in the minds of the men fighting. The very idea that the doctors were just like them quickly changed as the war progressed. Their reputation for their hardhearted methods of chopping off limbs and moving quickly to the next patient started to sour on the men. There are many cases where men would write in their diaries that they would rather die instantly in combat than to endure the torture of that of the doctors who would prolong their suffering before meeting their deaths anyway. A veteran wrote, “Darkness & fog surrounded the medical

⁵¹ Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Soldiering in the Army of Northern Virginia: Statistical Portrait of the Troops Who Served under Robert E. Lee* (University Of North Carolina Press, 2014): 19.

⁵² Ibid, 18-19.

profession. The doctors were then feeling their way thru their duties, as a blind man gropes his way a long a strange street.”⁵³ The image of the doctor during the Civil War quickly evolved from healer to executioner. Whether that distinction was fair is not up for debate, but it very much changed the psyche of the soldier in the war. Morale would plummet drastically whenever sickness plagued the camps. Soldiers knew when they enlisted or were drafted into the war that the possibility of dying on the battlefield was high, but many of these soldiers did not sign up to die of the chronic diseases or watch many of their beloved comrades die from them as well.

The question remains, what did medicine and aid look like at that time that left soldiers so wary and traumatized of not only doctors, but the facilities that they ran? In “From Hand Maiden to Right Hand: The Civil War,” Victoria L. Holder writes extensively on the way that aid worked for the soldiers since hospitals often were not an option, especially whilst in the middle of a battle. She begins by detailing just how primitive medical intervention was and how lack of education in suturing and mending arteries how that was the main reason amputation was very common during wartime. Also, congress began to realize how unprepared they were for such a long and bloody war that would necessitate prompt medical intervention on the ground in order to keep many soldiers alive as possible, but it would also need to be close to the battlefield in order to serve that very purpose. That was when the creation of the field hospital came about and with it, a lot of the soldier’s nightmares.

Holder goes into detail about just how horrific the conditions in these field hospitals were. If the severely wounded soldier was lucky enough to survive on the battlefield long enough to be carted off to the field hospital two miles or so away from the battlefield, what would meet

⁵³Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 52.

him would definitely not have been encouraging. Apparently, the staff that would be working in these field hospitals were overworked, sick themselves, and in some cases even injured as well.

Holder writes,

There was little thought for cleanliness or sanitary conditions. Supplies were minimal. Amputations were performed in these locations... Surgeons dipped their knives and saws in buckets of bloody water and wiped them on their aprons. Men and boys screamed out in pain and prayed to die. Wounds were dressed hastily with old rags, some of which had been rinsed out and reused.⁵⁴

Again, there is no wonder that soldiers feared these places as much as the battlefield. At least if they died in battle they would typically be killed quickly. If men lived long enough to see the inside of a field hospital, then usually that meant a slow and gruesome death awaited them. In fact, even those that were healthy tended to avoid these hospitals because of the horrific sight it offered. Sam Watkins records in his memoir of his first and last experience in a field hospital. The first words he writes on the experience says, "Great God! I get sick today when I think of the agony, and suffering, and sickening stench and odor of the dead and dying, of wounds and sloughing sores, caused by deadly gangrene; of the groaning and wailing."⁵⁵ He does not stop there, he continues to describe the piles of decomposing limbs everywhere, and he recalls that he had seen a lot of awful sights in the war but that he had, "...no recollection in my whole life, of ever seeing anything that I remember with more horror than that pile of legs and arms that had been cut off of our soldiers."⁵⁶ To his shock, he meets someone that he knew and who he saw basically get blown in half on the battlefield a few days prior. Watkins tentatively asks him whether he is still wounded, and what he sees when his acquaintance lifts up the blanket makes

⁵⁴ Holder, Victoria L. "From Hand Maiden to Right Hand: The Civil War." *Association of Operating Room Nurses.AORN Journal* 78, no. 3 (09, 2003): 457-458.

⁵⁵ Sam Watkins, *Company Aytch*, 273.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 274.

him never wish to step into a field hospital as long as he lived. He writes, “The lower part of his body was hanging to the upper part by a shred, and all of his entrails were lying on the cot with him, the bile and other excrements exuding from them, and they full of maggots.”⁵⁷

Sam Watkins’ experience in the field hospital haunted him for the rest of his life, while in other entries he tries to remain optimistic, humorous, and lighthearted, there were none of those qualities to be found in the grotesque images he had encountered in the midst of all the physical and mental suffering of the slowly dying. He never mentions the encounter with the field hospital again, but afterwards his tone becomes more serious and thought provoking as the end of the war draws near.

Putting a face to these physical struggles is very important, yet what is less focused on is the mental toll that battling, illness, and being away from loved ones took on the soldiers. These factors were at times just as devastating as any physical trial that the men would go through while away fighting. With all the horrors they faced daily, it would not be hard to imagine the immense anxiety that would always be at the back of their minds as they marched hundreds of miles away from their war-torn homes. Throughout the war and sources from that time, it is evident that these men were desperate to hear from their loved ones back on the homefront. This desperation varied from the comfort they sought from their wives and loved ones to the immense feeling of fear they felt as men being away from their families, unable to protect them from the horrors that were being faced within their communities. It is no surprise to discover that many of these men would frequently write to their wives begging for them to write more and faster in order to relieve the fear in their hearts. Both Oliver Caswell King and Burton Warfield prove to

⁵⁷ Ibid, 274.

be two excellent case studies that show that constant anxiety for their wives left behind and their constant need to hear from them for comfort and assurance that everything was okay.

Oliver Caswell King grew up between Virginia and Tennessee; and because his father was a wealthier farmer, Oliver was well educated. While attending college, he fell in love with his cousin Katherine Rebecca Rutledge. When the Civil War broke out in the Spring of 1861, Oliver enlisted to fight on the side of the Confederates as a Private under Captain A.L. Gammon. His correspondence with Katherine, who he affectionately nicknames “Toad”, continues throughout wartime. In a letter written to her on December 22nd, 1861 he writes to her from his sickbed detailing his thoughts and struggles. He writes openly saying,

One thing only am I constant in, and that, is love for thee. I am growing sick of life, and yet, I do not court death. I still see a light of hope in the hazy distance of the future, small and faint, yet a source of comfort in the darkest hour of my mental existence. I hate the world. I hate mankind; only one tie binds and links me to being's mystic chain... Toad, I must quit writing. I am miserable.⁵⁸

This account shows a small portion of what men in the war were going through as they constantly were battling their enemies and the constant threat of the sicknesses that spread through the camp. To add to all the physical suffering, their minds were troubled as well and their outlook dim. Especially when being so far out of reach of a loved one's care while suffering through all the mental and emotional strain.

Yet, his desperation for his wife is even more evident when on June 14th of 1864, he writes a letter to Katherine after the Battle of Piedmont in Virginia where he becomes life

⁵⁸ Oliver Caswell King and Katherine Rebecca Rutledge King Papers, 1856-1893, VII-M-5, Box 1, Folder 10, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

threateningly injured almost to the point of amputation and taken prisoner. He is kept alive and taken care of by the family of Zachary Johnson and his tone becomes desperate as his letters continue to go unanswered from his father and Kathrine. In his sorrow he lashes out in his letter writing,

Have you not read my letters? Do you not know that I am dangerously wounded? Do you not know that I have been anxiously expecting you for a week past? And do you not know that my dire disappointment is weighing heavily and grievously on my spirits? Oh! Come? Gentle wife and chase away the ennui of pain and helplessness.⁵⁹

His father would later arrive in order to aid his son. Oliver survives the war with no amputation required, but he is laid up in bed until mid-1865 in recovery and has to walk with a cane the rest of his life. We receive a telling insight into the psyche of a sick, lonely, and jaded man throughout his writing to his wife. He constantly longs to hear from her, even going as far as to beg her to write more and to write faster because he cannot bear the passing of days without her words. This desperation for connection is evident through the physical and emotional traumas he suffered, and the communication difficulties of wartime made it even more traumatic for Oliver.

Oliver would be far from the only soldier that would experience the emotional trauma of being away from a loved one in the midst of mental and physical anguish. *Letters to Anna* by James R. Knight is a book dedicated to the case study of Burton and Anna Warfield, a couple from middle Tennessee separated by war. When the war broke out in 1861, Burton was 31 years old and a farmer trying to provide for his family the best that he could. He immediately enlisted

⁵⁹ Oliver Caswell King and Katherine Rebecca Rutledge King Papers, 1856-1893 (June 22, 1864) ,VII-M-5, Box 1, Folder 10, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

leaving behind his wife, children, and mother to go and do his duty for the South. He and others in his town were enlisted as cavalymen, which came to be known as Second Battalion, Tennessee Calvary. Burton was later given the title 1st Lt. of Company A, First Tennessee Calvary.⁶⁰ A glimpse into the everyday struggles of a soldier on the battlefield is given by the letters Burton consistently sends to his wife, Anna. It is important to note that Burton even admits to holding a lot of his experiences back in order to protect his wife and children from worrying to much about him. Yet, while he holds back the events themselves, he does end up writing about the emotions that he is experiencing as he frequently takes ill, is wounded, and is even taken captive throughout the war.

Almost immediately after his enlistment in October of 1861 under the command of General Simon Buckner, Burton took ill and found himself laid up in a hospital in Bowling Green, Kentucky. His letters come across as miserable as he is feels useless and lonely away from his company. He writes to Anna on October 14th, 1861, “I do want to see you so bad, can’t you come up here and stay a few days...As I can’t come I ask you to come.”⁶¹ This will not be the only time during the conflict that Burton will write to Anna asking her to either join him if the company is nearby or simply asking her to write more. He writes once more in January of 1862, “You can’t imagine how much I think of you and desire to be at home to enjoy the peace and quietude of the family circle.”⁶² This indicates a very common trend in the life of a soldier, especially one that had a family back home to worry about.

⁶⁰ James R. Knight, *Letters to Anna: The Civil War through the Eyes and Heart of a Soldier* (Nashville, TN: Cold Tree Press, 2007), 1-91.

⁶¹ James R. Knight, *Letters to Anna: The Civil War through the Eyes and Heart of a Soldier* (Nashville, TN: Cold Tree Press, 2007), 16-17.

⁶² *Ibid*, 23.

Burton's writings begin to pick up a lot more once he is captured by the Union and taken as a prisoner of war. Burton and his comrades were settling in Maury County, Tennessee in Columbia when he and thirty-three other Confederates were captured by Colonel Monroe. Burton was one of the men captured in the raid.⁶³ Burton was then transferred to a prison in Sandusky, Ohio in August of 1863. He would spend 22 months there off of Lake Erie on Johnson's Island. His prison experience, while not as bad as the some of the more notorious prisoner of war camps, still had similar struggles. Sleeping conditions were horrendous with often two to three men sharing the same small bunk, rationing became sparse as food shortages worsened, lack of decent clothes to hold off the chill of those winter months, and correspondence with loved ones being extremely hard to send in and out of the camp. His worry for his family only worsens as he finds it more difficult to remain in contact with them. In a letter dated October 15th, 1863, Burton writes to Anna about his anxiety saying, "I have been quite uneasy and even distressed about you all."⁶⁴ Eventually, Burton is moved to another prisoner of war camp known as Point Lookout in Maryland and then finally to Fort Delaware towards the end of the war where he faced horrible conditions more than at any other camp. The food was so limited and awful that people were becoming sick and the drinking water was also causing people to fall ill. In what letters he can send his thoughts turn more and more towards home constantly writing, "I am uneasy and anxious to hear from you."⁶⁵ His anxiety for his family only seems to worsen his health throughout his almost two years in prison. He would not be released until the March of 1865, by that point he had spent a good portion of the war as a prisoner and it was a bitter pill for him to swallow as he made his way back home with the weight of a lost war on his shoulders.

⁶³ Ibid, 89-91.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 119.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 181.

Though there was relief amongst the bitterness as he writes and he is able to finally make his way back and home and be united with the family he had so anxiously and constantly thought over and desperately missed.

Through the case studies of Oliver Caswell King and Burton Warfield, both give perfect examples of how soldiers off at war were constantly torn between their fight on the battlefield and their loved ones waiting for them back home. The Civil War soldier may come across as stoic and battle hardened, but through the letters sent back home it is evident there was a lot more going on in the psyche of the common everyday soldier. It comes as no surprise then that the soldier had a lot more difficulties than just the prospect of being killed in battle or dying from disease, they would also have to come to terms with these strong feelings of anxiety and helplessness when it came to the horrific images they had to encounter on a daily basis and the frequent worries they had being so far away from home while their loved ones were essentially fighting their own battles right in their backyard.

Both men and women suffered far more than just the psychological ramifications the war had to offer. Mentally and emotionally, those that played significant parts in the conflict on the homefront and in the midst of the battlefield would find themselves facing a starker reality of warfare that they had not been exposed too in their generation's lifetime. These ramifications would last longer than any sickness or simple battle wound. These scars would not be visible to the human eye, but they would be just as debilitating. In the midst of war, their mental struggles had just begun, and where it would lead would change the fabric of the nation.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD did not become a recognized mental disorder until years after the Vietnam War ended. PTSD may not have been a recognized disorder in the decades after the Civil War, but that did not stop the same symptoms from affecting the majority

of returning soldiers for the rest of their lives. Typical symptoms of PTSD were the following: flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety surrounding the traumatizing event, depression, sleeplessness, paranoia, and in some cases acts of violence. At the time, PTSD was identified under names such as such as combat fatigue, soldier's heart, heart irritability, nostalgia, and in some cases acute mania. Even less specific terms for their feelings were used such as, "...phrases such as 'the blues,' 'lonesome,' 'disheartened,' 'downhearted,' 'discouraged,' 'demoralized,' 'nervous,'..."⁶⁶

Though there is no true way to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Civil War soldier suffered from mental illnesses such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Their experiences and the emotions they wrote about; however, evidence that they did experience the symptoms of some of these disorders, which became evident even to medics during the war. The soldier did not just experience physical manifestations of the horrors of camp life and the battlefield. Mentally they struggled as well. Homesickness ran rampant, which for the most part was predictable. Doctors became concerned when homesickness started to take a darker more debilitating turn. In *Psychological Consequences of the American Civil War*, R. Gregory Lande writes, "In some cases, the wistful hunger for home assumed a nearly delusional force combined with a steady descent into a morbid melancholia. Military surgeons recognized this sometimes fatal form of homesickness as nostalgia."⁶⁷ Men would become incessant in their ramblings of home and would often begin to behave oddly. They would quickly lose motivation and frequently would become fatigued. Soldiers would often become anxiety ridden and often would refuse meals, eventually turning into living skeletons due to no physical illness the doctors could detect. At this point, surgeons began to realize just how serious nostalgia was and some even

⁶⁶ Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 116.

⁶⁷ R. Gregory Lande, *Psychological Consequences of the American Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2017), 14.

granted furloughs so that the men that were afflicted could get their head back on straight. Fellow soldiers frowned on their brothers in arms acting cowardly enough to take a leave of absence merely because they felt blue. The soldiers that scorned those that left due to nostalgia did not realize that if their brothers-in-arms were left untreated that nostalgia would worsen, and lead to suicide.

Suicide rates during the war are very difficult to determine. Especially in the South, where records seem sparse. R. Gregory Lande in his article “Felo De Se: Soldier Suicides in the American Civil War” writes, “The surgeons reported 268 suicides over 51 months, beginning with 1 suicide in June 1861 and concluding with a last reported suicide in August 1865. Over this time period the Union Army averaged 5.25 suicides per month.”⁶⁸ While confederate suicide records and experiences are difficult to uncover, there was one case study that depicts just how far suicide reached, especially in the South.⁶⁹

It was July of 1862, Eugene Grissom, a Confederate Captain, had just been admitted to Second North Carolina Hospital after getting shot in the leg in the 7 Days Battle. While there, he would experience just how much insanity drove soldiers towards unspeakable acts. He would never forget the awful sight of the nineteen-year-old John Roland, who had fought in the same battle, attacking doctors and nurses with a knife, before turning the blade on himself and “...stabbed himself in the chest and then cut his own throat twice, severing the windpipe. He then jumped out a nearby window, expiring some twenty minutes later on the sidewalk

⁶⁸ R. Gregory Lande, “Felo De Se: Soldier Suicides in America's Civil War.” *Military Medicine* 176, no.5 (05, 2011), 533.

⁶⁹ As stated, suicide records in the South during and even after the war are hard to determine because of the records are few and far between. The South was so unstable through these years that documentation seemed to have went on the backburner. What records were found were sparse or through local newspapers that reported the incident.

outside.”⁷⁰ Accounts such as this would continue on both Union and Confederate sides as the war and morale worsened.

Women may have not been facing feelings of nostalgia due to the horrors of the common soldier, but they did have a similar cross to bear. With their homes often so close to Union lines and the chances of invasion high, many became fearful for the lives of their families. Fleeing from their home turned war zones became at times the only option. In fact, “More than 250,000 Southern residents were displaced during the conflict and at least half this number moved several times in an effort to stay within Confederate lines, while others fled into Northern or Western states and territories or to foreign countries.”⁷¹ Women that fled the conflict in the South were viewed by men and women alike as cowards. Southerners considered refugees as those that left because they wanted to have a more comfortable and pleasant existence. Just like soldiers that had to leave the battlefield due to nostalgia, women who abandoned their homes were considered unpatriotic and cowardly. Despite the belief of many, being a refugee was anything but pleasant. Often times the only places that displaced Southerners could stay were temporary shelters usually overrun with “...fleas and bedbugs.”⁷² Even the refugee women turned the hate of the public into her own self-hatred. This hatred could very easily be compared to a general losing a battle or a soldier being sent home from the fight. Margaret Beckwith wrote her disgust with herself best saying, “...I felt like a deserter.”⁷³ The fear, anxiety, and self-hatred seemed to be a constant presence as the war began to draw to a close. How could any of these individuals ever return to a life of normalcy when mentally they would always bear the scars of their survival?

⁷⁰ David Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 8.

⁷¹ Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 291.

⁷² Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 43.

⁷³ Margaret Beckwith, quoted in Faust's *Mothers of Invention*, 44.

Aftermath: How the Dead Kept Living

Cornelia Spencer once wrote, “In all such revolutions the ground swell after the storm is often as destructive as the storm itself.”⁷⁴ At the end of the war, the majority of the survivors of the war were glad to see an end to the carnage. Both Union and Confederate troops were thrilled to be going home. While for the South the loss of the war and returning home was bittersweet, they too were just glad to be home with their families. Soldiers from both sides of war were still reeling from the mental and physical scars that they carried. On top of the immense traumas they suffered during the war, the emotional strain of leaving their fellow comrades and brothers behind weighed heavily on them. Abner R. Small of Maine had this to write on the subject of leaving his fellow troops, “That was hard; I prefer not to speak of it; I cannot.”⁷⁵

Southern women had mixed reactions over the loss of the Confederacy in the war. There were quite a few that were glad the blood-soaked years were at a close, others were bitter, angry, and full of hatred over the loss of the war. Emma LeConte wrote in her diary that

They say right always triumphs, but what cause could have been more right than ours? Have we suffered all—have our brave men fought so desperately and died so nobly for this? For four years there has been throughout this broad land little else than the anguish of anxiety—the misery of sorrow over dear ones sacrificed—for nothing... Why does not the President call out the women if there are not enough men? We would go and fight, too—we would better all die together... anything that will give us freedom and not force us to live with such people—to be ruled by such horrible and contemptible creatures—to submit to them when we hate them so bitterly. It is cruel—it is unjust.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 317.

⁷⁵ Abner R. Small, quoted in Dean's *Shook Over Hell*, 97.

⁷⁶ LeConte, *The Diary of Emma LeConte*, 90.

Whether Southern women rejoiced at the ending of the war, or shook their fists at the sky with anger and hatred, both had a new responsibility towards their loved ones coming home. Even with their newly formed identity of independence, they would be required to not only give up their position as head of household, but at the same time they would have to look after their mentally unstable husbands, fathers, and brothers. Faust writes, “Women were confronted not just with the delicate task of defending their own interests in the face of failures and incompetence of their traditional ‘protectors’; they had to deal as well with these injured and broken men.”⁷⁷ These were not the men they had waved a tearful goodbye too and worried endlessly for while they were off at war.

One example of just how psychologically impactful the post-war years had on women can clearly be seen in the life of Gertrude Clanton Thomas. Massey writes, “...the postwar pressures changed her husband into a short-tempered, moody person who took refuge in the bottle and resorted to profanity...”⁷⁸ Throughout all his drinking, verbal abuse, and emotional abuse, their family was in serious financial straits. They were losing properties very quickly and she had to become a teacher in order to supplement their income. She would be in financial ruin the rest of her life, despite her and her children constantly working. Post-war experiences such as these were very common in the South, and some would end much bloodier.

Likewise, soldiers faced mixed emotions when returning home because of the fact that a lot of their families and members of their community just did not understand how the war changed them. Most coming home were completely different men than that of when they last

⁷⁷ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 252.

⁷⁸ Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 326.

left. They often had taciturn moods and would drift off in the middle of conversations as if they were somewhere else entirely. Survivor's guilt ran rabid in the minds of veterans. The changes in the Civil War veteran did not end there. There were many times that a veteran would be behaving normally, but then change into a completely different, paranoid person. Those that knew them and loved them did not know what was going on, but one thing was for sure; no one truly survived the war because who they were before the war was dead just like all of their other comrades. The veteran's mental scars would haunt them the rest of their life and in many extreme cases would end up taking their lives as well.

The war may have been over, but the bitterness, hatred, and aggression it had bred in the returning Confederate soldiers had not even yet begun to fester. Lande, in his book *Psychological Consequences of the American Civil War*, writes, "From every part of the country a black plague of crime infected cities large and small, an epidemic that led to calls for extreme remedies such as vigilante justice."⁷⁹ The Reconstruction years, especially for the South, would only further debilitate the increasingly harrowing situation. Though both Northern and Southern veterans and civilians alike were glad to see an end to the carnage filled years of the war, that did not mean hostilities on both sides were extinguished. Confederate soldiers returning home longed for a return to some amount of normalcy, while the North did almost everything in their power to shape the South in their own image. That meant the South would no longer have the privilege of governing themselves. Even though most Confederates signed an oath of loyalty in order to officially be welcomed back into the Union, Northerners still did not trust their loyalties. Radical Republicans were sent down to hold office, lest the people attempt to put ex-leadership

⁷⁹ R. Gregory Lande, *Psychological Consequences of the American Civil War*, 123-124.

into power. This would cause even more paranoia and tension with the already high strung ex-Confederates.

With the tension came an intense realization of just how much the South had fallen into degradation. Not only did they have to rebuild most of their cities, but they had no real way of enforcing laws. Only the Radical Republicans that had invaded the South held any sway and this led to mass violence becoming the new normal in the South. Newspapers reported ex-Confederates completely terrorizing and pillaging whole towns. Murdering people in order to take their land was also not uncommon. Citizens decided to take the law into their own hands in order to defend their communities. Except, there was also violence for violence sake. Lande writes, "...the root cause of the violence was initially attributed to the 'social demoralization caused by the war, the evils of which it will take centuries to eradicate.'"⁸⁰

Newspapers daily would report monstrosities occurring in both the North and the South. There are multiple accounts of men murdering their entire families. Yet, in a lot of the violence that men returning home from the war participated in, it was the violence that had a purpose that was the most inhumane. It was the kind of violence supported by dehumanizing rhetoric and the burning hatred towards Radical Republicans and now freed African Americans.

Dean writes, "Vigilante bands and possess were formed to control the violence, although some of these were the Ku Klux Klan outfits, more interested in challenging federal rule and the empowerment of the freedman than in suppressing random violence in the countryside."⁸¹ The newspaper *Public Ledger* in Memphis, Tennessee reported on just what the KKK truly believed. It read, "Let the enemies of free government and the advocates of negro equality and negro

⁸⁰ Ibid, 124.

⁸¹ Eric Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 99.

domination beware! White men, and white men alone, are the comprehensive exponents of constitutional liberty, and must and will...govern the American Public.”⁸² These men’s hatred for Radical Republicans and African Americans became the pulpit on which they touted their freedom and peddled their violent rhetoric to the masses. There was only so much anger that ex-Confederates could hold in before inevitable tragedy would strike. One particular case study provides the perfect example of just how violent and chaotic the post-war South had become. In Memphis, Tennessee in May of 1866, only a year after the end of the war, the psychological effects of the Civil War would be made known in a brutalizing way.

It would later come to be known as the Memphis Race Riots and it would be heralded as the worst race riot in the history of Tennessee. The three days of bloodshed started with an argument between white policemen and ex-Union, African American soldiers. With the anger, tension, and blood thirst already set to boil over, this argument would lead to mobs of white civilians becoming embroiled into the conflict. What followed would be the systematic destruction of many black neighborhood communities. By the end of the three days, forty-six African Americans would be murdered compared to that of two white men. Almost twice that number would be injured and over one hundred buildings ranging from homes, schools, and churches would be nothing but ash as they were consecutively burned to the ground by the mob.⁸³

Personal accounts shed light on the actions and emotions of those involved in the riot. In the first testimony, Dr. R. M. McGowan describes how he witnessed policemen firing into a

⁸² Public Ledger. “The K.K.K.—What Is It?” (Memphis, Tenn. 24 April 1868. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.), 1.

⁸³ "Testimony to the Freedmen's Bureau and to the Joint Congressional Committee about the Memphis Race Riots." TSLA: "Disasters in Tennessee". Accessed April 26, 2017. <http://share.tn.gov/tsla/exhibits/disasters/memphis.htm>.

crowd of African American bystanders. When the doctor managed to return to his home, an African American soldier came to his door begging for a place to find shelter. Dr. McGowan accepted him into his home, but shortly after white men and police barged onto his property. When the doctor was questioned on why he had aided a “nigger”, he defended the soldier. The white man began cussing the doctor saying, “you damn Yankee son of a bitch you can’t come down here to live.”⁸⁴ He was then forcibly pulled out of his house, while being threatened to be set on fire. One of the policemen knew who he was and got him released, but the next morning he went into work and found his store looted.

The testimony of Ellen Dilts echoes the same tone of anger and hatred. In her account, she witnessed the beginning conflict between the police and the former Union, African American Soldiers. She reports that she never witnessed any of the African American men having weapons on their persons. In fact, the police and white civilians were the only ones she saw with weapons used in order to attack the defenseless men. When an African American asked them why they attacked those that did nothing wrong, she overheard a policeman tell his fellow officers, “Kill every nigger, no matter who, men or women.”⁸⁵ Anna George’s testimony further proved the barbarity of the situation, as she reported witnessing the shooting of a girl by the name of Frances Johnson. When the girl’s mother ran to help her, she was shot by one of the mob, while the others took her daughter and tossed her into the fire they had created in order to destroy the colored people’s property. Frances was burned alive. Yet, Anna confessed, “There was quite a

⁸⁴R. M. McGowan, “Testimony of Dr. R. M. McGowan,” Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://share.tn.gov/tsla/exhibits/disasters/riots.htm>

⁸⁵ Ellen Dilts, “Testimony of Ellen Dilts”, Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://share.tn.gov/tsla/exhibits/disasters/memphis.htm>

number of police with the crowd, they were encouraging them to go on. The police had badges on at the time and did not arrest anyone.”⁸⁶

The psyche of the men returning home from the war did not heal simply because they were away from a warzone. As evidenced by the Memphis Race Riots, the forming of militant groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, and the rising waves of crime sweeping the nation, the war was not on the battlefield anymore. It had returned home in the minds of those that survived physically intact, but mentally broken. Lande describes the sentiment best writing, “Four years of war had also drenched America in death, debasing human life.”⁸⁷

The post-war years were a mess and the majority of Northern and Southern veterans played a huge part in that mess. Even those whose violent outbursts did not destroy towns or make headlines in the newspapers were facing a stark reality about their post-war life. They faced a reality of being terrorized by their own minds. For the Civil War veteran the war never truly ended. It was common for the survivors of the war to become very paranoid at times. There are many reports out of the North and especially the South about veterans hardly sleeping and barricading themselves in their own homes at night waiting for an enemy that would never come. Doctors would have to prescribe these soldiers sedatives at the pleading of concerned family members, but even then the veteran would only allow it if they were in a place that felt safe and often with a weapon nearby in case of an ambush. Flashbacks were common and some soldiers even reenacted battles if they became serious enough. In very extreme cases, some would even turn on members of their own families because of their delusions of seeing the enemy in every

⁸⁶Anna George, “Testimony of Anna George, Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://share.tn.gov/tsla/exhibits/disasters/memphis.htm>

⁸⁷ Lande, *Psychological Consequences of the American Civil War*, 142.

face. In even more extreme cases, the veteran would end up killing others or ultimately himself to escape the hell of the post-war years.

Suicide was such a common part of post-war life that many civilians and soldiers alike did not know how to deal with it. Lande in his article “Felo De Se: Suicides in America’s Civil War” writes, “The census data of 1870 reported 1,080 suicides among men and 285 among women.”⁸⁸ This concerned and astonished the public because even after the war the religious atmosphere still hanged heavy on the hearts and minds of the American people. If murder before the war was considered the ultimate sin, suicide was right there beside it. Lande continues, “The act of suicide puzzled the public. It seemed to defy the natural order promoting self-preservation. Suicide also offended the religious morals of the typical 19th-century U.S. citizen. In many cases, suicide was explained as an impulsive act, the byproduct of insanity.”⁸⁹

In David Silkenat’s *Moments of Despair*, he writes more extensively on the rates of suicide in North Carolina in the post-war decades. His methods on trying to get accurate estimations on suicide rates were to view how many times the act of suicide was reported in newspapers. Obviously, he acknowledges the setbacks to this approach as well, because not all suicides would make headlines due to the fact that family members would not want their loved ones to be disgraced in death. His findings were still realistic in where he observed his data from, he writes:

⁸⁸ R. Gregory Lande, "Felo De Se: Soldier Suicides in America's Civil War." *Military Medicine* 176, no.5 (05, 2011), 1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 2

In 1871, for instance, North Carolina Newspapers reported 14 suicides, more than twice as many as had been recorded in any single year during the previous three decades. After 1871, notices of suicides became more and more common in North Carolina newspapers, reaching an apex of 31 suicides in 1883. All told, between 1871 and 1893 the newspapers ran 459 articles about suicide, representing 386 individual deaths, an average of nearly 17 per year.⁹⁰

Rising crime rates and records of a rise in suicides throughout the South and even the North indicated that something had gone horribly wrong during the Civil War. Men and women alike were struggling to cope with their change in identities and the mental trauma the years of conflict had wrought. Specifically, in the South, it did not help that their mental and physical environment matched in how unstable and chaotic they were. In the process of rebuilding their cities and homes; they would also have to struggle with rebuilding who they were when the war had been won and they were on the losing side.

In conclusion, The Civil War irrevocably changed the identity of both men and women in the South in different, but just as traumatizing ways. Through analyzing both sexes' lived experiences of the war, it became obvious that it did not matter whether they were male or female. Every person that was involved extensively in the war in one way or another would leave those years with the symptoms of a psychologically scarred mind. Through letters, diaries, and newspapers their voices still cry out through time, and are still begging for their plights both mental and physical to be heard by those who are still willing to listen.

⁹⁰ Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*, 29.

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