

# *Dying of Nostalgia: Homesickness in the Union Army during the Civil War*

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In a chapter from his *Echoes of the Civil War As I Hear Them* (1905), entitled “The Humor of Field and Camp,” Wisconsin officer Michael Hendrick Fitch recalled an amusing caper involving William Cumback, a representative from Indiana, who “told a good joke on himself as well as his wife, regarding this word, ‘Nostalgia.’” While visiting regiments from his home state, an officer informed Cumback that several soldiers were afflicted with a sometime-deadly disease known as nostalgia. Entirely mystified by this seemingly pervasive ailment, Cumback sought counsel from a regimental surgeon who clued-in the baffled politician as to medical terminology. Spotting an opportunity ripe for mischief-making, Cumback wrote his wife to note that “a great many” Indiana soldiers were “suffering with nostalgia,” adding that he too had “a touch of it” but doubted its severity. Panicked by her husband’s admission, Mrs. Cumback rushed the unwelcome news to the

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family doctor, whereupon he informed her that her husband was suffering from a simple case of homesickness.<sup>1</sup>

Astride the story's wider allusions to the nature and extent of illness and the efficacy of medical care during the Civil War, there rests, of course, Fitch's juxtaposition of homesickness and nostalgia. Conceived originally as a type of homesickness that plagued seventeenth-century Swiss mercenaries while they warred abroad, nostalgia (from the Greek *nostos*, a yearning to return home, and *algos*, pain) became all-too-familiar to doctors and surgeons during the Civil War, and they readily acknowledged the condition as a bona fide disease. As scholars from many diverse disciplines continue to reflect upon nostalgia's myriad guises and significances, a discussion of nostalgia's relationship to homesickness suggests itself.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, Fitch's humorous aside raises a number of important questions for historians of the Civil War. What predicated the nostalgia of the average soldier during the conflict? Were there any marked differences between the sufferings of Union soldiers and those of their Confederate adversaries? What were the symptoms? Was there a remedy? Why did ideas and images of home become the poignant focus for so many adolescent men? Did notions of home (and its associations) have any kind of cultural resonance with these young Americans? Were soldiers the only ones who suffered from the affliction? Given the recent explosion of interest in the social history of the era and current attention afforded to the history of medicine and the history of disability, these questions are significant and timely ones and they have excited some interest among historians of the Civil War, especially in a plethora of soldier studies to have emerged within Civil War historiography since the 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

1. Michael H. Fitch, *Echoes of the Civil War As I Hear Them* (New York: R. F. Fenno and Co., 1905): 335–36.

2. Recent scholarship concerned with nostalgia's genealogy includes Stuart Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," *Cultural Studies* 9 (Oct. 1995): 453–64; Kimberly K. Smith, "Mere Nostalgia: Notes on a Progressive Parathory," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 3 (Winter 2000): 505–27; and Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, and Denise Baden, "Nostalgia: Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions," in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, ed. Jeff Greenberg, Sander L. Koole, and Tom Pyszczynski (New York: Guilford, 2004): 200–214.

3. Among many examples, see especially Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1952); Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences* (New York: Viking, 1988); James I. Robertson Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1988); Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New

In 1984 Donald Lee Anderson and Godfrey Tryggve Anderson, in their largely forgotten study, “Nostalgia and Malingering in the Military during the Civil War,” set out parameters for future debate with their examination of homesickness and indolence among Union combatants, but did little to suggest any relationship between the two. For Eric T. Dean Jr., writing in the 1990s, nostalgia appeared among Civil War soldiers as a depression borne of disorientation, a stress anxiety induced by the trauma of combat and an antecedent to twentieth-century shell-shock, combat fatigue, and post-traumatic stress disorder. More recently, Frances Clarke has offered a revision of this hypothesis, suggesting the emphasis that recent war trauma scholarship has placed upon the horrors of combat and on observing its devastation is misplaced; rather, the nostalgia of Union combatants, the focus of her study, underscored their dislocation from familiar surroundings and spoke compellingly to the fracturing of family ties as the “most distressing trials that a soldier could undergo.”<sup>4</sup> Regrettably, each study largely ignores homesickness among Confederate soldiers and bypasses any extended discussion of homesickness in wider historical contexts. Thinking through the vexing problem of homesickness among Civil War combatants alongside earlier European deliberations on the subject prompts us to recognize the remarkable consistency of nostalgia to strike at potentially any soldier displaced from home.

Although these studies offer important and thoughtful insights into homesickness among Union soldiers during the Civil War, they only marginally address the *idea* of home itself. For the purposes of this study, a clearer understanding of what home meant to Union soldiers is crucial to realizing

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York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993); Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1997); James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997); Joseph Glatthaar, “The Common Soldier of the Civil War,” in *New Perspectives on the Civil War: Myths and Realities of the National Conflict*, ed. John Y. Simon and Michael E. Stevens (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 119–44; and Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2007). Aaron Sheehan-Dean provides a useful summary of recent historiography on soldiers in “The Blue and the Gray in Black and White: Assessing the Scholarship on Civil War Soldiers,” in *The View From the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Aaron Sheehan-Dean (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2007), 9–30.

4. Donald Lee Anderson and Godfrey Tryggve Anderson, “Nostalgia and Malingering in the Military during the Civil War,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 28 (Autumn 1984): 156–66; Eric T. Dean Jr., *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), 115–34, esp. 128–30; and Frances Clarke, “So Lonesome I Could Die: Nostalgia and Debates Over Emotional Control in the Civil War North,” *Journal of Social History* 41 (Winter 2007): 253–82.

the nature and extent of their homesickness. Home is, and means, so much more than any particular place; home is a conglomeration of memories and senses, it is the knowledge and familiarity of locale; home articulates belonging and our feelings toward its setting and surroundings proffers comfort and assurance. While Confederate soldiers were prone to and suffered from homesickness (Basil L. Gildersleeve, the distinguished classical scholar at Johns Hopkins University noted the prevalence of nostalgia among Confederate soldiers, especially North Carolinians), in this study I too have chosen to concentrate on Union soldiers, for which more primary literature appears to exist, particularly in official records.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, Union soldiers, many of their number raw, youthful volunteers, attached much importance to home associations, and with loved ones now far away, and these intimate, familial linkages were crucial to either maintaining some kind of mental and emotional symmetry or deflating spirits and puncturing morale.

Indeed, Reid Mitchell, author of *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home*, cites from the experiences of an Illinois private whose homesickness was so intense that it not only periodically “reduced him to tears” but may have actually sustained him through the course of the war, ensuring his “psychological survival.”<sup>6</sup> To leave one’s native soil and family behind and find oneself in unknown and dangerous environments soon necessitated many soldiers to remember their way back “home,” as it were, in memories and letters and other modes of recall: displacement led to recognition and the realization of what is missed when gone.

Yet while wartime memoirs and biographies, regimental histories and campaign narratives, and the sundry diary entries and letters written between family members and friends are ubiquitous with mention of “homesickness,” “the blues,” “loneliness,” and similar expressions of dislocation, we do not yet understand the broader implications “nostalgia” had in relation

5. Basil L. Gildersleeve, *The Creed of the Old South, 1865–1915* (1915; repr., New York: Arno, 1979), 90. H. H. Cunningham, *Doctors in Gray: The Confederate Medical Service* (1958; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1986) affords nostalgia little attention, noting Confederate medical regulations simply listed the affliction among “all other diseases” (184). Cunningham also cites the prominent Confederate surgeon Francis Peyre Porcher on the subject (213). Yet in their post-Civil War memoirs and recollections, former Confederates Thomas Cooper De Leon, Gilbert Moxley Sorrel, Albert Theodore Goodloe, Marietta Minnigerode Andrews, and Phoebe Yates Pember all note the prevalence of homesickness among Confederate soldiers during the conflict. This area of interest still awaits its historian.

6. Mitchell, *Vacant Chair*, 135, 137.

to the wartime experiences of Civil War combatants. This article, then, shall consider why so many Union soldiers succumbed to nostalgia, why some were more prone to its effects than others, and the extent to which and in what ways their ailment was managed.

It may not be superfluous, however, to begin by exploring nostalgia's etymology vis-à-vis homesickness. Intriguing evidences of the desire to return home can be found in many ancient literatures, long before "nostalgia" was devised to identify and categorize the phenomenon. The Bible, of course, tells us of the exiled Jews who wept for their homeland: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion" (Psalms, 137:1). Homer chronicled Odysseus's rejection of immortality in favor of returning to his cherished kingdom of Ithaca, despite warnings of an adversely long and eventful journey. Such yearnings apparently infused archaic Chinese texts since the time of Confucius. In 8 A.D. the Roman poet Ovid was banished to the shores of the Black Sea, where, in unhappy exile, he composed the elegiac *Tristia* ("Sadness") and pined his life away for his beloved Rome. Years earlier, Hippocrates, the Greek physician and father of medicine, had noted a perverse melancholia—a black bile infection of the bloodstream that played havoc with one's balance and tempted an abundance of unpleasant side effects—among those who left their native soil.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, nostalgia-like symptoms were already recognized across much of mainland Europe long before the affliction was labeled as such—*das Heimweh* in German, *la Maladie du Pays* to the French, *el mal de corazón* in Spanish—and scattered verifications confirm nostalgia's early-seventeenth-century presence. For example, at the conclusion of the Thirty Years War, as historian Geoffrey Parker has noted, several soldiers of the Spanish Army of Flanders were diagnosed with related illnesses that rendered them unfit for duty. Drafted—sometimes compelled—into service and then sent to the Netherlands, where leave was highly unlikely, sorrowful combatants would lurch into a state of grave despondency at the hopelessness of their situation. Parker speculates that another expression—*estar roto* (to be broken)—likely communicated the same ailment. Broken soldiers were invariably deemed

7. Charles A. A. Zwingmann, "'Heimweh' or 'Nostalgic Reaction': A Conceptual Analysis and Interpretation of a Medico-Psychological Phenomenon" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford Univ., 1959), esp. 9–11; Anthony Brandt, "A Short Natural History of Nostalgia," *Atlantic Monthly* 242 (Dec. 1978): 58; Smith, "Mere Nostalgia," 507, 509, 515; and Sedikides, Wildschut, and Baden "Nostalgia," 200–201.

unsuitable for continued service, released from duty, and repatriated.<sup>8</sup> It would not be long, however, before medical opinion conferred a more suitable appellation upon this peculiar complaint.

The term “nostalgia” was coined in 1688 by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss doctor at the University of Basel, in his *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia*, where he presented the first detailed examination of nostalgia’s psychological and physiological characteristics. The malady, according to the young physician, was “sympathetic of an afflicted imagination” and was prevalent in both male and female adolescents sent abroad for the first time, his diagnosis based on two cases in Basel and information garnered from Swiss mercenaries serving in France. According to Hofer, the disease was the result of a “continuous vibration of animal spirits through those fibers of the middle brain in which impressed traces of ideas of the Fatherland still cling.” By continually dwelling on images of home, these bodily spirits became more dominant and so the preoccupation with returning to one’s native land intensified. According to Hofer, warning signs of nostalgia’s propinquity included scorn for foreign customs, a tendency to shun conversation, annoyance at being the butt of jokes, and disparagement of other regions yet simultaneous delight in one’s own native territory.<sup>9</sup>

8. Parker’s research unearthed evidences of (at least) six soldiers ejected from the army from 1643 to 1644 because of their homesickness. Yet a question remains: Were there other cases in preceding or subsequent years? Another record told of a man in his early forties discharged for a similar complaint. Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries’ Wars*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 143. See also George Rosen, “Nostalgia: A ‘Forgotten’ Psychological Disorder,” *Clio Medica* 10 (Apr. 1975): 30; Frank Tallett, *War and Society in Early-Modern Europe, 1495–1715* (London: Routledge, 1992), 108; Ole Peter Grell, “War, Medicine, and the Military Revolution,” in *The Healing Arts: Health, Disease and Society in Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. Peter Elmer (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2004), 275. The problem was no doubt compounded by more general issues of capture and incarceration, death of comrades, ill health and sickness, and desertion. See, for example, Christopher Storrs, *The Resilience of the Spanish Monarchy, 1665–1770* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 26–31. On medical provision for late-seventeenth-century Spanish armies and navies, see Christopher Storrs, “Health, Sickness and Medical Services in Spain’s Armed Forces c. 1665–1700,” *Medical History* 50 (July 2006): 325–50. As a preventative measure against homesickness, Spanish soldiers were often “seasoned”; that is, sent to the Italian provinces of Lombardy, Sicily, and Naples, thus to a favorably pleasant climate with an abundance of wine and women. Soldiers could then be sent to the Low Countries, a much less appealing theater of war. Dennis Showalter and William J. Astore, *Soldiers’ Lives through History: The Early Modern World* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2007), 120–21.

9. An English translation of Hofer’s thesis is provided by Carolyn Kiser Anspach, “Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, 1688,” *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* 2 (Aug. 1934): 381, 384.

Those who actually succumbed to nostalgia's depression exhibited increased signs of melancholy, a depression that fostered unrelenting thoughts of home, disrupted sleep patterns, and induced frailty, hunger pains, unquenchable thirst, heart murmurs, repeated groaning, stupor, and fever. More serious warning signs of nostalgia's presence included lung and further heart complications, swelling around the brain, and even the contemplation of suicide. Hofer recommended a somewhat kaleidoscopic array of cures, including, among others, purging the stomach to aid the digestive system, various medicinal concoctions including doses of mercury and opium, the application of leeches, visits to the Alps, and the company of others to offset nostalgic longing, all the while assuring patients that they would be returned home as quickly as possible if symptoms persisted.<sup>10</sup>

The malady was particularly acute among Swiss mercenaries serving abroad. They hungered after favorite soups, craved the milk distinct to their own region, and missed freedoms denied to them in active service. Memories of tastes and smells, the sound of familiar alpine herders' melodies, and various other seemingly unimportant associations of home triggered bouts of nostalgia among the soldiers of fortune. The Swiss milking song "Kühre-Reyen" ("Ranz des Vaches" in French) was reckoned to generate mass nostalgia among the rank and file and, according to one authority, several Swiss troops fled from a battlefield upon hearing the distant clink of cowbells in a nearby pasture, much to the chagrin of the King of France.<sup>11</sup>

By the late eighteenth century, nostalgia had spread. No longer considered solely a 'Swiss-disease,' it was recognized more and more as a "frequently fatal disease" and medical opinion largely agreed that "all peoples and all social classes" were endangered by its menace, especially those among the great armies that were engaged in combat across Europe during the greater part of the century.<sup>12</sup>

10. *Ibid.*, 386, 388–90.

11. *Ibid.*, 384, 389; Zwingmann, "'Heimweh' or 'Nostalgic Reaction,'" 19–20. Jean-Jacques Rousseau noted too the effect cowbells had on the Swiss: their ringing "excite in them a bitter sorrow [of] loss" for all the "joys of life," he writes. "The music does not . . . act precisely as music, but as a memorative sign." Quoted in Jean Starobinski, "The Idea of Nostalgia," *Dio-genes* 54 (Summer 1966): 92. On the Swiss mercenaries of the era in French service, see John A. Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle: The French Army, 1610–1715* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 328–36.

12. Starobinski, "Idea of Nostalgia," 95; Rosen, "Nostalgia," 34–37. In 1793 worried French officials granted leave to homesick soldiers if the complaint was deemed serious enough. Others preferred more drastic action. Jourdan Le Cointe, a French doctor, in his book *The Health*

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, the curable disease gradually morphed into an incurable modern malaise that was due in part to the massive changes wrought by industrialization, migration and urbanization upon the western world; a condition exacerbated by the onset of the distinctly modern notion of progress—the Mr. Hyde to nostalgia’s Dr. Jekyll. Here we begin to see the emergence of nostalgia in conjunction with thoughts of escaping and evoking time; the former disease now indicative of those romanticized, and often melancholic, yearnings for lost worlds, lost moments, lost ways of life, and those lost childhoods from which we appear to have been irreversibly severed. In the United States, however, the emergence of nostalgia as something apart from homesickness came to prominence only after the Civil War, when Americans of the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth gave voice to an increasing uneasiness and concern over the remarkable transformations surging through Gilded Age and Progressive Era society, character, and culture. The rose-tinted rearward gaze of nostalgia, however, was more than an escapist retreat into an uncomplicated past. According to Michael Kammen, the creative employ of nostalgia helped turn-of-the-century Americans “legitimize new political orders, rationalize the adjustment and perpetuation of old social hierarchies, and construct acceptable new systems of thought and values.” Here, against a

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*of Mars*, published in 1790, proposed equal doses of pain and terror to rid soldiers of their homesickness; red-hot branding irons would be applied to their abdomens. The afflicted, he predicted confidently, would be cured immediately and cited the example of a Russian general serving in Germany who, some sixty years earlier, had buried homesick soldiers alive to rid his ward of nostalgic pining, albeit after two or three interments. Starobinski, “Idea of Nostalgia,” 96. Conversely, autopsies conducted on French soldiers who fell during Napoleon’s retreat from Moscow revealed a swelling around the brain that was consistent with contemporary understandings of nostalgia. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic, 2001), 5. Moreover, defeat seemed only to intensify nostalgia’s grip on Napoleon’s armies, as evidenced by disastrous reverses in Egypt and Poland. Certainly French soldiers appeared to be susceptible to nostalgia in ways and intensities similar to their Swiss counterparts, although medical opinion struggled to distinguish between genuine cases and malingerers who simply feigned homesickness. Nonetheless, one might cite many examples—the skirl of bagpipes apparently placed Scottish Highlanders at nostalgia’s mercy, while an adolescent Welsh soldier suffered chronic homesickness upon refusal of a furlough—by way of testimony to nostalgia’s seeming ubiquity. Rosen, “Nostalgia,” 35–36, 37, 39, 44. See also Lisa Gabrielle O’Sullivan, “Dying for Home: The Medicine and Politics of Nostalgia in Nineteenth-Century France” (Ph.D. diss., Queen Mary, Univ. of London, 2006). For extended discussion on the relationship between war and nostalgia, see G. S. Rousseau, “War and Peace: Some Representations of Nostalgia and Adventure in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Guerres et Paix: La Grande-Bretagne au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1998), 121–40.



backdrop of immense change and uncertainty, nostalgia allowed Americans to invent a “past that would help to define . . . national identities in positive ways, and . . . secure traditions to serve as strong psychological anchors. Otherwise, as one momentous century ended and the prospect of a new and uncertain one loomed, they faced the future as culturally displaced persons. Nostalgia meant more . . . than consolation. It provided identity, integrity, and perhaps even a sense of security—however false.”<sup>13</sup>

In Europe by the mid-nineteenth century—as medical advances gathered pace—nostalgia slowly began to fade from the clinical stage, shedding its medical traces and becoming less a physical and more a psychological condition.<sup>14</sup> Remarkably, however, it was not to be the final curtain call for the “Swiss-disease,” as nostalgia returned to the spotlight once again during the Civil War in a noteworthy postscript faithful in part to its original guise.

Homesickness was not unknown in the United States prior to the onset of the Civil War. As Susan Matt has shown, Americans first encountered homesickness during the 1770s, when thousands of men left the familiarity of their homes to participate in the Revolutionary War, although the word “nostalgia” had not yet appeared to describe their displacement. While a prominent medical discourse on homesickness existed in eighteenth-century Europe—French psychiatric literature had long accepted nostalgia as a clinical entity—American medical experts were largely oblivious of such evidences. Army doctors and officers invariably dismissed the plight of homesick soldiers in condescending tones, mocked or embarrassed those who succumbed to their emotions, or rejected the afflicted out of hand as feigning malingerers.<sup>15</sup>

The news of the fall of Fort Sumter on April 14, 1861, which marked the

13. Starobinski, “Idea of Nostalgia,” 101, 103; Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xvi, 7–16; and Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (1991; repr., New York: Vintage, 1993), 295.

14. As late as 1840, however, a doctor was summoned to treat a young American woman in Paris who, expecting a child and seemingly downcast at the prospect, wished to return to her home in Boston, an unnecessary journey according to her Swiss husband. A legal fray ensued, and the doctor was called upon to give evidence and testified that the young woman was suffering from nostalgia: a condition that “proceeds from an unusual longing for the native country. . . . If the desire is opposed and cannot be gratified, it terminates in insanity, and sometimes produces death.” The doctor demonstrated further that the malady was a woe to which the Swiss were “particularly prone.” Guillermo C. Sanchez and Thomas N. Brown, “Nostalgia: A Swiss Disease,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 151 (Nov. 1994): 1715–16.

15. Susan J. Matt, “You Can’t Go Home Again: Homesickness and Nostalgia in U.S. History,” *Journal of American History* 94 (Sept. 2007): 472–73; and Howard Lewis Applegate, “Remedial Medicine in the American Revolutionary Army,” *Military Medicine* 126 (June 1961): 45.

onset of the Civil War, also highlighted the emotional anguish of northern soldiers who, in confronting extraordinary social and political turmoil, faced detachment from their homes and the resulting uncoupling of the familiar. Consequently, extensive medical debate and deliberation on the subject of homesickness in America was articulated around this time. As Matt explains, “the adoption of the word ‘nostalgia’ to describe feelings of homesickness was one sign of the greater legitimacy accorded the condition. . . . [I]t was only during the Civil War that [nostalgia] became a common medical diagnosis in the United States. Perhaps because the emotion was so widespread among soldiers and because they seemed to feel it more intensely than civilians in peacetime, the word and the diagnosis caught on.”<sup>16</sup>

Any attempt to grapple with the extent to which nostalgia affected Union soldiers throughout the duration of the Civil War is not without its problems. The diagnostic groups and methods of classification of diseases favored by doctors varied wildly, and thus the categorization of a disease like nostalgia was beset by numerous discrepancies of interpretation, a verity that is reflected in official records and reports.

For example, one medical handbook understood nostalgia to be “a form of mental disease which comes more frequently under the observation of the military surgeon. . . . Considered a mental disease,—and there can be no doubt that the primary phenomena of this state are mental,—it belongs to the class *Melancholia*. The extreme mental depression and the unconquerable longing for home soon produce a state of cachexy, loss of appetite, derangement of the assimilative functions, and, finally, disease of the abdominal viscera,—in fact, the objective phenomena of the typhoid state. . . . As Nostalgia is not unfrequently fatal, it is a ground for discharge if sufficiently decided and pronounced.” Such a suitably broad and wide-ranging definition of nostalgia, combining both psychological and physiological effects of the malady, was perhaps understandable, given there were no experts during the Civil War era that specialized in the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, on the whole, the period was witness to the careful description and

16. Matt, “You Can’t Go Home Again,” 482–83.

17. Roberts Bartholow, *A Manual of Instructions for Enlisting and Discharging Soldiers with Special Reference to the Medical Examination of Recruits, and the Detection of Disqualifying and Feigned Diseases* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1864), 21–22; and Clarke, “So Lonesome I Could Die,” 272n5, 275n26. See also George Worthington Adams, *Doctors in Blue: The Medical History of the Union Army in the Civil War* (1952; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1996), 228.

detailing of medical definitions and testimony. New and successful surgical procedures and best treatment practices were published in journals and pamphlets. Colleagues shared ideas and inspirations, insights and initiatives, had faith in and despaired at accepted wisdoms. Statistics and other verifiable information were collected, lists compiled, evidences registered. Doctors and surgeons determined to meet the challenge of the circumstances facing them head-on, although remedial prevention and care had to acquiesce with considerations beneficial to military policies of enlistment and leave.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, as one authority on psychiatric care has written, “general psychiatric problems were given but scant notice in the literature of military medicine during the Civil War.”<sup>19</sup>

While only a few pages are devoted to mental and nervous diseases in the official multivolume *Medical and Surgical History of the War of Rebellion* (1888), nostalgia is afforded some attention. Indeed, the statistics recorded therein, although partial and often contradictory, show the malaise “developed to a morbid degree” among white Federal soldiers throughout the duration of the war with some 5,213 cases identified, equating to 2.05 cases annually per thousand during the first year of the war. During the second year, the rate of occurrence increased to 3.35 per thousand men in the field when (for the year ending June 30, 1863) 2,057 cases and 12 deaths were reported. For reasons unknown, the editors of this mammoth work did not analyze or chose to include rate of occurrence figures beyond the second year of the war. Although the number of deaths recorded for the years ending June 30, 1864, and June 30, 1865, increased, the number of documented cases fell by 845 and again by 102. Altogether, the statistics reveal 58 deaths among white soldiers for the period May and June 1861 through the year ending June 30, 1866 (table 1). This contrasted with 334 cases and 16 deaths among black soldiers (table 2).<sup>20</sup>

18. R. Gregory Lande, *Madness, Malingering, and Malfesance: The Transformation of Psychiatry and the Law in the Civil War Era* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2003), 169.

19. Albert Deutsch, “Military Psychiatry: The Civil War, 1861–1865,” in *One Hundred Years of American Psychiatry*, ed. J. K. Hall (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1944), 377. As the author elaborates further, the dearth of evidence is reflected in a collection of essays organized by the U.S. Sanitary Commission between 1862 and 1864 and edited by Surgeon General William A. Hammond. Many eminent physicians contributed articles to the volume on a wide range of subjects—including military hygiene and therapeutics, the control and prevention of infectious diseases, and vaccination in armies—but there is no mention of mental or nervous diseases. See William A. Hammond, ed., *Military, Medical and Surgical Essays* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1864).

20. J. K. Barnes, ed., *Medical and Surgical History of the War of Rebellion, 1861–1865*, 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1870–88), vol. 1, 1:638–39, 711, 3:884–85 (quotation).

Table 1. Summary of nostalgia cases among white Union soldiers during the Civil War

Year ending	Cases	Deaths	Deaths per 1000 serving in the field
May–June, 1861	65	0	1.56
June 30, 1862	572	1	2.05
June 30, 1863	2057	12	3.35
June 30, 1864	1212	16	1.96
June 30, 1865	1110	24	1.93
June 30, 1866	197	5	1.99

Source: J. K. Barnes, ed., *Medical and Surgical History of the War of Rebellion, 1861–1865*, 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1870–1888): vol. 1, 1:638–39.

Table 2. Summary of cases of nostalgia among black Union soldiers during the Civil War

Year ending	Cases	Deaths	Deaths per 1000 serving in the field
June 30, 1864	146	9	3.32
June 30, 1865	135	5	1.62
June 30, 1866	53	2	0.96

Source: Barnes *Medical and Surgical History of the War of Rebellion* vol. 1, 1:711.

Both the number of cases and deaths attributed to nostalgia calls for further elaboration. First, the number of cases of nostalgia is relatively small, especially when compared alongside such (sometime epidemic) diseases as typhoid fever, diarrhea, dysentery, and more severe instances of respiratory infection. Second, soldiers stricken by nostalgia were often more vulnerable to ill health generally and thus prone to illnesses and infections that prowled camps, hospitals, and prisons. When soldiers shunned food, exercise, and contact with others, they became jaded and weary and thus fell victim to disease all the more easily. Moreover, soldiers already suffering from other diseases yielded to nostalgia more readily too; as spirits drooped heartache for home grew. One might also suggest another reason for susceptibility to nostalgia in this context. Through boyhood, as youths, and into adulthood, nineteenth-century American males depended on women (as the embodiment of the home) to care for them in body, mind, and soul. Indeed, as Reid Mitchell has identified in letters and other accounts of hospitalized soldiers—some of them near death, feverish, others

confused and disoriented—many were prone to retreat to their childhood, a regression in which they craved somebody—invariably their mothers—to provide care, comfort and compassion. In some instances, even the nurses themselves reminded soldiers of their mothers and, by implication, their homes. Absence, after all, makes the heart grow fonder.<sup>21</sup>

James A. Wright, a sergeant in Company F of the 1st Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, witnessed as much and recorded his observations for his postwar memoir. Recalling the summer of 1862 in camp, he determined that over half of the men in his company were afflicted with malaria and dysentery “to a degree that greatly impaired their strength” and rendered others entirely unfit for duty and so they convalesced in their tents or simply lay upon the ground often refusing their meager rations. Memories of one particularly forlorn individual lingered. Hiram A. Skinner died in an ambulance before reaching the hospital, the first in the company, since its formation, to succumb to disease. Rather slovenly in his sanitary habits, he became “wasted and stricken by disease, discouraged and homesick, he seemed to give up the struggle and died,” remembered Wright. It was a sight all too familiar to the sergeant. As Wright explained: “His case was a type of many another who, when no longer able to perform their daily duties, were excused, went to their little tents, and laid down to think of themselves, home, and its associations. Then the weakened vitality would seem to react upon and paralyze all of the other faculties until volition and hope were changed to submission and despair—and the end came soon.”<sup>22</sup>

The statistics on nostalgia in the *Medical and Surgical History* appear to reveal a higher death rate among black soldiers—a rate of 47.9 deaths per thousand cases (by comparison, the statistics divulge a rate of 11.1 deaths per thousand among whites). While the total number of black soldiers diagnosed with nostalgia was fewer than the number identified among white troops—data on sickness and mortality regarding black soldiers was not amassed until mid-1863—Union doctors and surgeons were nevertheless of the opinion that blacks were far more likely to succumb to nostalgia’s malady than whites.<sup>23</sup>

21. Anderson and Anderson, “Nostalgia and Malingering,” 158; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic, 1993), 22–23, 28–29, 92–93; and Mitchell, *Vacant Chair*, 76–79.

22. James A. Wright, *No More Gallant a Deed: A Civil War Memoir of the First Minnesota Volunteers*, ed. Steven J. Keillor (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), 138.

23. Clarke, “So Lonesome I Could Die,” 257, 275n28.

Among many concerns and controversies surrounding the suitability of blacks to soldier in the Union army, white officers and physicians cited deficiencies in strength of will and endurance as underlying reasons behind the elevated rates of mortality from disease among black troops. According to a high-ranking officer in the 14th United States Colored Infantry, blacks made for unsuitable enlistments “because he belonged to a degraded, inferior race, wanting in soldierly qualities; that his long bondage had crushed out whatever manliness he might naturally possess; that he was too grossly ignorant to perform intelligently his duties of the soldier.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, a report summarizing casualty-rate statistics among black troops supposed their elevated sickness ratios pointed to their being “less able than the white [soldiers] to endure the exposures and annoyances of military service.” The report discerned “difference[s] of stamina” between the two races, explaining that the “greater susceptibility” of blacks to disease “arose from lack of heart, hope, and mental activity,” stressing “that a higher moral and intellectual culture would diminish the defect.” Further testimony likewise reckoned blacks to be “very susceptible to disease,” claiming exposure and ignorance as detrimental to the health and general vigor of black soldiers. Even “under ordinary privations, [black soldiers were] apt to become disabled, give up in homesickness and quickly sink to the grave.” Indeed, a survey conducted by the U.S. Sanitary Commission in 1863 on the health of black soldiers investigated the prevalence of nostalgia among black combatants but could come to no conclusion as to whether soldiers who had once been plantation slaves were more prone to the malady.<sup>25</sup>

24. Bell Irvin Wiley, *Southern Negroes, 1861–1865* (1938; repr., New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), 301. Further prejudices against black soldiers are documented in Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (1953; repr., New York: Da Capo, 1989); and Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861–1865* (1956; repr., Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1987). As one historian explains, “onerous work details, along with generally insufficient and inferior regimental care, contributed to black soldiers’ suffering from significantly higher morbidity and mortality rates than whites. Around one in five black soldiers died from disease as compared to roughly one of every twelve white soldiers.” Of the 68,178 black soldiers who died during the Civil War, only 2,751 fell in battle; the remainder succumbed to their wounds, were reported missing, or perished from disease. John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful That We Have Colored Troops That Will Fight,” in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 41.

25. Report, Adjutant General’s Office, Nov. 14, 1866, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1880–1901), ser. 3, vol. 5, 669 (hereafter cited as *OR*); Edward A. Miller Jr., *The Black Civil War Soldiers of Illinois: The Story of the Twenty-Ninth U.S. Colored Infantry* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1998), 172; and Margaret Humphreys, *Intensely Human: The Health*

Given a paucity of source material, it is difficult to come to any satisfactory conclusions regarding homesickness among black soldiers during the Civil War. "Of the tiny handful of trained black physicians in this period," explains Frances Clarke, "none wrote on the topic of nostalgia, and this silence extends to the writings left by black soldiers." There are, however, a few scattered statements that speak to homesickness among black Union soldiers. Surgeon Henry Penniman of the 1st Mississippi Heavy Artillery, African Descent, observed much homesickness in his camp and found it responsible for a number of deaths there. In keeping with the official deliberations on the subject, Penniman likewise held that blacks "are greater sufferers both in frequency of cases and mortality from homesickness than whites" and thus were "so debilitated in mind and body as to fall easy victims to any disease." According to the surgeon, "many deaths accredited to other causes" might "more properly be classed under the head of nostalgia."<sup>26</sup>

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*of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008), 55. Moreover, Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Free Press, 1990), has written of the stresses experienced by white officers of black regiments who, while trying to exude confidence and display conviction, had to simultaneously mask any qualms they may have had regarding their ward or reservations about parading their authority. Furthermore, they would have to fight alongside soldiers whom they considered unproven, inadequately taught, and not entirely dependable under fire. Because of their isolation, many struggled to find sufficient outlet to vent their frustrations (163–64).

26. Clarke, "So Lonesome I Could Die," 257, 275n27; Keith P. Wilson, *Campfires of Freedom: The Camp Life of Black Soldiers During the Civil War* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 2002), 186. In a substantial late-nineteenth-century collection of medical oddities culled from various sources, the editors note "two cases of fatal nostalgia" during the Civil War, one of which "was a member of a regiment of colored infantry; he died after repeatedly pining for his old home." George M. Gould and Walter L. Pyle, *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine: Being an Encyclopedic Collection of Rare and Extraordinary Cases . . .* (1896; repr., New York: Sydenham, 1937), 876. Moreover, that nostalgia lingered through to war's end and beyond is evidenced by an affidavit from a couple of former soldier friends of a one Joshua Helm of the 116th United States Colored Troops, readied to assist his widow's pension application. As the war drew to a close, private Helm looked forward to returning home after a long separation from his family. However, it soon transpired that the regiment was not to be discharged but rather dispatched from Virginia to Texas, the news of which caused Helm "to become much depressed in spirits" and led, apparently, to the "total derangement of his mind." He soon began to babble about his wife and children, claiming a letter he received told of their deaths when in fact no such letter had ever arrived. Denied a furlough, his conversation "became extremely wild and nonsensical," at which point he was sent to an asylum in Washington, where insanity was promptly diagnosed. There it was determined that his altered state "was produced by an inordinate desire to return home, in other words, was the result of a most violent attack of Nostalgia." Helm never regained his health, and he lived out his final years in a federal insane asylum, where he died in 1871. "Excerpt from the Affidavit of Harrison Caldwell and Mester Talbott, Feb. 6, 1874, Civil War Pension File of Joshua

The adage that “there’s no place like home” not only recognizes that from which we are removed but also expresses sentiment and universality of attachment to home life and its comforts, to a domestic ideal. Mid-nineteenth-century northern culture placed much emphasis on ideas of domesticity; it was at the very heart of family and society, speaking “to the emotional power which the very idea of home exercises over its inmates, as memory, as fantasy, and through affecting images” as John Tosh has written in relation to masculine identities in middle-class homes in Victorian England. Moreover, women—mothers, sisters, wives, and sweethearts—were central to realizing a virtuous domestic vision, especially their role therein as sources of nurture, kindness and sympathy, as well as being crucial to maintaining the stability of the home environment and to local communities many soldiers believed they were fighting to protect.<sup>27</sup> For Union soldiers, then, to spend time away from home, to be removed from home life, to be without close personal connections in day-to-day interaction was to be at nostalgia’s mercy; homesickness, after all, assailed those soldiers estranged from the familiarity of their home surroundings and who suffered as a consequence from a lack of social interaction and support networks. Home and its locale were places where these young men could function with assuredness, as opposed to moving around in strange territory, over unknown terrain and its attendant insecurities, and furthermore being at risk from enemy fire and disease. Many soldiers equated home with confidence and security in ways that contrasted with their wartime disorientation.

As Bell Irvin Wiley and others have noted, the Union army was for the most part a youthful (volunteer) army; those in their late-teens and early to mid-twenties and who were generally unmarried comprised the bulk of the rank and file. The majority came from an agricultural or rural background—Wiley estimates, for example, that farmers comprised nearly half their total—and were generally an unworldly albeit autonomous lot. Moreover,

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Helm, 116th USCI, RG 15,” in *Voices of Emancipation: Understanding Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction through the U.S. Pension Bureau Files*, ed. Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2008), 75–76. See also Edwin S. Redkey, ed., *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861–1865* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 163.

27. Mitchell, *Vacant Chair*, 72, 74–75; John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), 27. See also Matt, “You Can’t Go Home Again,” 479–82.



many enlistees, especially those from rural areas, lacked immunity to defend against childhood diseases such as measles and mumps and were thus vulnerable to outbreaks of infection. The idea that troops from a rural background were more seriously affected by nostalgia than those from an urban one was not new; indeed, it was an observation that had been made much earlier by French physicians. A nurse at Point of Rocks Hospital on the Appomattox River recalled several strapping farmers—“ninety days selected men” from Ohio—who were admitted with typhoid but “were really suffering more from nostalgia than from fever. They had already served half their term, yet nothing could arouse them from despair and homesickness, from which many of them actually died, while the wiry, irrepressible city boys generally recovered.”<sup>28</sup>

As Frances Clarke rightly observes, much of the focus on Union soldiers sick with nostalgia has tended to concentrate on adolescent enlistments or men idling in camp, prison, or hospital; and much of that attention has centered on white sufferers. Moreover, contemporary medical opinion differed significantly on approaches to alleviating—and treating—the problem. On the one hand, some military and medical men promoted discipline and not a little steadfastness to regulate and, if necessary, restrain emotional outbursts. Men were to be kept active, involved, absorbed; comradeship was to be fostered through the shared experience of combat; those who did fall victim to bouts of homesickness could be chastised out of their depression. On the other hand, to other Union spokespersons—along with concerned citizens and charitable organizations—these practices were as insensitive as they were cruel. Rather, a more considerate and caring approach, intended to reconnect soldiers to

28. Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 303–4; Mitchell, *Vacant Chair*, esp. chaps. 1 and 2; Glatthaar, “Common Soldier,” 120; Paul E. Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War: Natural Biological Warfare in 1861–1865* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), 12; Rosen, “Nostalgia,” 40; and Adelaide W. Smith, *Reminiscences of an Army Nurse during the Civil War* (New York: Graves, 1911), 88. That said, those “irrepressible city boys” of which the nurse spoke were not entirely immune to outbursts of homesickness. In his study of Union volunteers from Dubuque, Iowa, a rapidly growing industrial and commercial center, Russell Johnson cites from the letters of George Healey, a former clerk who often glossed over frontline realities (and his homesickness) to avoid worrying his mother. Admitting his new career as a soldier to be “dreary,” Healey wrote his family that his homesickness had consumed “many a day,” although he thought better of revealing his feelings to his fellow soldiers. Healey was retained in service at war’s end, and, consequently, as Johnson notes, his homesickness “became even more desperate.” Writing in June 1865, Healey exclaimed: “I think I have this word ‘Home’ every other word.” A month later, he vowed: “I don’t think of anything else but Home and I’ll be darned if I don’t get Home!” Russell L. Johnson, *Warriors into Workers: The Civil War and the Formation of Urban Industrial Society in a Northern City* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2003), 296–97.

unraveled family networks or weakened community ties, might lessen the circumstances that triggered the original attack of homesickness.<sup>29</sup>

In 1863 Assistant Surgeon General De Witt C. Peters published in the *American Medical Times* a thorough report on nostalgia and its effects on Union combatants. Entitled “Remarks on the Evils of Youthful Enlistments and Nostalgia,” the piece’s opening comments underscored his concerns on military practices and procedures for enlisting volunteers. Holding up French conscription methods as an exemplar, Peters demanded greater efficiency from U.S. medical officers and the application of more stringent rules to weed out unsuitable volunteers, many of them already ill and impressed into service regardless “with a mere farce of an examination” to determine their suitability. Although there were great pressures placed on recruitment officers to bolster numbers before a regiment could be mustered into service, Peters despaired that the poorly among their number were dispatched to hospitals to clog up wards and overburden hospital staff, not to mention the drain on medical costs and expenditures incurred on clothing, equipment, food and transport. “In the Regular Army the folly of enlisting poor material is well understood by officers and men; therefore the recruit is subjected to the most rigorous examination . . . before being admitted to his future company and regiment,” he wrote. According to Peters, “fresh and youthful” volunteers had no such grounding, and they left their homes “flushed with patriotism” in eager anticipation of the adventure that lay ahead. After a few months, however, “the novelty of long marches, guard duty, exposure, and innumerable hardships, has vanished, his mind begins to despond, and the youth is now a fair victim for fever or some other terrible scourge that is to wreck his constitution and blight his hopes.” Before long, these youngsters surrendered to “the bitter pangs of home-sickness” and in time “more serious ailments.”<sup>30</sup>

Peters’s concern was not without foundation. Gen. James Shields wrote Gen. Irvin McDowell in June 1862 to express his fears that Union volun-

29. Clarke, “So Lonesome I Could Die,” 253–54, 261.

30. By contrast, Peters found “older and more sturdy” troops better equipped to resist disease and dependency. “In him we see the *man developed*. . . [T]he balanced mind . . . acknowledges but few worldly disappointments, and his physical economy, by obeying the laws of hygiene, soon adapts itself to the man’s new mode of existence,” he opined. De Witt C. Peters, “Remarks on the Evils of Youthful Enlistments and Nostalgia,” *American Medical Times*, Feb. 14, 1863, 75. On homesick teenagers during the Civil War, see Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 123.

teers “are like the Swiss troops . . . ; if not [allowed] to go home and see their families they droop and die. I have watched this,” he added anxiously. While Shields respected this expression of “human feeling,” he nevertheless regarded homesick soldiers wholly useless to the Union war effort.<sup>31</sup>

Nourished “by a lack of discipline, confidence, and respect,” nostalgia was, according to Surgeon General Peters, “a species of melancholy, or a mild type of insanity, caused by disappointment and a continuous longing for home.” The problem was especially marked in military hospitals and prisons, he noted and, according to the observations of another doctor, invariably stalked two groups of soldiers: firstly, “young men of feeble will,” who had “highly developed imaginative faculties” and displayed “strong sexual desires,” and a second group that comprised “married men for the first time absent from their families.”<sup>32</sup>

A few pertinent examples might be relevant here. Of the former group, Lt. George Kies, upset that she believed him to be having an affair with and spending money on another woman, wrote his wife in Connecticut from his post in Baltimore to allay her fears and reinforce his everlasting desire. “[I] do awfully want to som times and think that i should not care what become of me in the morning if i could sleep with you one night and have as good times as we used to in each others armes. I suppose you want it sometimes. i do when I think of you and that Pretty Leg of yours,” he lusted. Kies’s wife, satisfied with her husband’s protestations of innocence, mailed to him her picture; it was a keepsake that invoked “so many pleasant recollection[s]” of domestic life and sustained memories of home amid much homesickness.<sup>33</sup>

While overt references to sex feature infrequently in the writings of Civil

31. Shields to McDowell, June 19, 1862, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 12, 3:410. A month later, Gen. Erasmus Keyes imparted similar fears to the quartermaster general. Citing newspaper reports of improving health among his charges as something of a misnomer, Keyes had taken to daily inspection of regiments and had witnessed not only the spirit of many high-ranking officers “beginning to droop” but found the “minds and bodies” of tens of thousands of soldiers “growing weak together” and worried that the soldiers’ cramped conditions near the James River during the hot, humid summer months would “secure disease, weakness, and nostalgia as a certain crop.” Keyes to Meigs, July 21, 1862, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 11, 3:332.

32. Peters, “Remarks,” 75; Roberts Bartholow, “The Various Influences Affecting the Physical Endurance, the Power of Resisting Disease, Etc., of the Men Composing the Volunteer Armies of the United States,” in *Contributions Relating to the Causation and Prevention of Diseases, and To Camp Diseases Together with a Report of the Diseases, Etc., Among the Prisoners at Andersonville, Ga.*, in *Sanitary Memoirs of the War of Rebellion*, 2 vols., ed. Austin Flint (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 1:22.

33. Mitchell, *Vacant Chair*, 19–20.

War soldiers, passions and urges nevertheless remained on their minds. A soldier who spent a lonely Christmas without his fiancée pictured a happier time altogether. “My darling how my thoughts have been following you all day. I have pictured you in all kind[s] of positions until my imagination has been tired out,” he wrote in letter. A Michigan engineer who lamented the rise of soldiers’ “horns,” expressed in a letter to his wife his concerns about loneliness at home with the men-folk away. “I have herd men when they are talking about old men being guilty of such [a] thing that the older the Back the stifer the horn and the women, some of them, appear to have the same disease. I hope you won’t ketch it.”<sup>34</sup> Many soldiers may well have understood their sexual frustrations in terms of homesickness or, perhaps, equated such desires as one of nostalgia’s manifestations.

Of the latter group, an officer of the 15th Wisconsin bristled at the content of letters that married soldiers received from their wives, particularly the “complaints, and whinings, asking him to ‘come home’ etc., [which] has more to do with creating discouragement and finally sickness and disease than the hardships he has to endure.” To be sure, the death of recently married Vermont volunteer Frederic D. Whipple was put down to “a clear case of nostalgia.” After an examination that revealed no appreciable symptoms of disease, baffled surgeons asked him to explain his “strange and pitiable” behavior. “He said that he wanted to go home,” recalled a soldier from Whipple’s company. An exasperated officer sent the patient to the infirmary, “where, refusing to be nursed, after a few days he died, moaning piteously all the time, ‘I want to go home—I want to go home.’”<sup>35</sup>

34. J. Matthew Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), 81; Thomas P. Lowry, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn’t Tell: Sex in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1994), 33.

35. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 134; E. M. Haynes, *A History of the Tenth Regiment, Vermont Volunteers, with Biographical Sketches of the Officers Who Fell in Battle . . .* (N.p.: Tenth Vermont Regimental Association, 1870), 24–25. Vermont troops appeared particularly susceptible to nostalgia. During the first winter of the war, Charles S. Tripler, the medical director of the Army of the Potomac, was troubled greatly by the magnitude of sickness—“measles, sharing the lot of all irregular troops” and “remittent and typhoid fevers”—among some of the Vermont regiments that comprised General Brooks’s brigade. “They give us the largest ratio of sick of all the troops in this army, and that ratio has not essentially varied for the last three months,” he bemoaned. Among concerns over unsuitable camping ground, the surgeon expressed his disquiet to General McClellan that “a nostalgic element” was “affecting this brigade unfavorably. This cannot be remedied while the spectacle of their sick and dying comrades is before them,” he noted. “Extracts from a Report to General G. B. McClellan to the Hospitals of the Army of the Potomac, in December, 1861, and January, 1862, by Surgeon C. S. Tripler,” in Barnes, *Medical and Surgical History*, vol. 1, 1:61–62.

To reinforce Peters's findings, one might equally cite from the experiences of a couple of hospital invalids and a few prisoners of war. An anonymous correspondent writing from the general hospital in Nashville reported on "a very sick boy" ill with pneumonia and placed hastily on guard duty, lest a Confederate raid upon the city. Lying in a dank trench overnight and exposed to other convalescent soldiers, the youngster succumbed to a relapse and was removed to a ward whereupon "a most touching nostalgic delirium set in. He wanted to go home. He begged, coaxed, reasoned, and at times would wildly cry out, 'I will go home.'" The patient was also prone to leap from his bunk, wrap himself up in his bed sheets, run through the hospital ward, crying, resolute in his desire to return home; his tears a poignant reminder of the extent of distance between somewhere and elsewhere. Orderlies returned him to bed and he died shortly thereafter.<sup>36</sup>

The same correspondent also recalled another homesickness case brought to the same ward. Stricken with dysentery, the ailing soldier desperately sought reunion with his mother and "wept like a child to go home." Under the care of a female nurse, the soldier was returned home and he eventually recovered there. The correspondent found homesickness "one of the most frequent, difficult, and annoying complications" among hospital patients. "When a soldier gets sick, he wishes himself at home. It is well for the surgeon to gratify this feeling, when the patient is in a fit condition to go," he advised. While many homesick soldiers displaying the early stages of nostalgia were hospitalized in the short term, only in the most severe circumstances might a full discharge from the army be considered.<sup>37</sup> Occasionally, however, doctors would assure patients that they would be returned home as quickly as

36. [Anonymous], "Homesick in the Hospital," in *Anecdotes, Poetry, and Incidents of the War: North and South, 1860-1865*, ed. Frank Moore (New York: Arundel Print, 1882), 129.

37. *Ibid.*; John Ordronaux, *Manual of Instructions for Military Surgeons, on the Examination of Recruits and Discharge of Soldiers* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1863), 63-64. Magic lanterns were sometimes used in hospital wards in an effort by authorities to lessen nostalgia. C. Keith Wilbur, *Civil War Medicine, 1861-1865* (Old Saybrook, Conn.: Globe Pequot Press, 1998), 88. It is interesting to note that some long-serving hospital staff suffered from a homesickness of sorts as well; not, however, for their own homes, per se, but for their surrogate home during wartime: the hospital ward. "Veteran workers became attached to place and spoke of coming 'back home' when they returned from furloughs," explains historian Jane E. Schultz. Harriet Eaton, for example, a nurse from Maine who traveled south to supply regiments and nurse soldiers from her state, found herself "homesick to get back to my work" in Maryland. Some hospital staff were loathe to witness the "breakings up of [their] little household" when recuperated soldiers were returned to the war. Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004), 70, 123, 257n16, 287n55.

possible if symptoms persisted: the mere promise of being allowed to return home on a furlough was often seen to be a cure in itself and served to snap soldiers out of their nostalgic depression.

For those soldiers detained as prisoners of war, incarceration proved a dreary and depressing experience of routine and repetition. As one historian notes, “many soldiers became victims of their own existence.” George H. Putnam, a prisoner of war in Libby and Danville prisons, witnessed a malevolent lethargy in detainees who “would sit twirling their thumbs or would stand looking out of the windows with a vacant stare and with eyes that saw nothing.” The future publishing magnate urged that minds be kept occupied lest the “risk of stagnation . . . develop into idiocy.”<sup>38</sup>

Inadequate food, clothing, and shelter, the omnipresence of disease and death, hollow rumors of imminent exchange, and dashed hopes of release all combined to blight the lives of captured soldiers. “Many are becoming so homesick and downhearted, that they believe any report, good or bad,” noted a member of the 76th New York Infantry from his captivity. “It is no place to get sick; courage must be kept up though rations go down.” Captivity exacerbated homesickness too. During his imprisonment at Danville, Abner R. Small of the 16th Maine Volunteers witnessed the effects of the incarceration upon his fellow inmates, “three officers, one a Yankee from Vermont, one an Irishman from New York, and one a Dutchman from Ohio,” who shared the cramped quarters. “They became homesick and disheartened,” he explained. “They lost all interest in everything, and would sit in the same attitude hour after hour and day after day, with their backs against the wall and their gaze fixed on the floor . . . they were dying of nostalgia.”<sup>39</sup>

Another prisoner, meanwhile, narrated the story of an intelligent and well-read Pennsylvanian family man who, from the outset of hostilities, was engaged in a desperate dual struggle with army life and ever-encroaching dependency. Fixated on his wife and children, he kept their letters and a small

38. Robertson, *Soldiers*, 195, 211; George Haven Putnam, *A Prisoner of War in Virginia, 1864–5*. Reprinted, with additions, from the *Report of an Address Presented to the N.Y. Commandery of the U.S. Loyal Legion, December 7, 1910* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 47–48. On Civil War prison life, see Charles W. Sanders Jr., *While in the Hands of the Enemy: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2005).

39. John Worrell Northup, *Chronicles from the Diary of a War Prisoner in Andersonville and other Military Prisons of the South in 1864* . . . (Wichita, Kans.: by the author, 1904), 69; Harold Adams Small, ed., *The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Letters of Major Abner R. Small of the 16th Maine Volunteers* (1939; repr., New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2000), 171–72.

photograph of them nearby at all times, no doubt to sustain him in his darker moments. He began to reject his rations, however, and was soon “delirious with hunger and homesickness,” his hallucinations, at least, returning him to his family once again. In his study of the notorious Andersonville prison camp in Georgia, William Marvel notes eleven cases of nostalgia diagnosed during mid-June 1864: among them a drummer boy, a newsboy, and a powder monkey. Nostalgia struck too at Andersonville’s prison guards, its gloomy depression recorded among three Confederate soldiers performing guard duty there. Writing shortly after the war ended, one former inmate likened “that strange disease which the physician knows as *Nostalgia*” to an energy-sapping parasite, one that “fastens upon the breast of its prey, and sucks, vampire-like, the breath of his nostrils.”<sup>40</sup>

A Union medical inspector writing in 1864 from Fort Delaware, an island prison for Confederate soldiers on the Delaware River, accepted that “captivity itself [had] a depressing effect” on inmates. “With it are associated nostalgia, disappointment, anxiety, a listless, monotonous life, absence of discipline and of regular exercise and occupation, all of which are lowering and disease inviting influences.” A later report, detailing a “miasmatic disease largely predominating and most fatal” that swept through the same confinement, noted the large numbers of deaths among inmates owed “probably to nostalgia, as the sick have every attention.”<sup>41</sup> Yet there are evidences that testify to the prison environment being so putrid that it aggravated “the inevitable nostalgia existing among the prisoners” to such an extent that those “whose cases were regarded as desperate, and who could not live

40. John McElroy, *Andersonville: A Story of Rebel Military Prisons, Fifteen Months a Guest of the So-called Southern Confederacy. A Private Soldier's Experience in Richmond, Andersonville, Savannah, Millen, Blackshear, and Florence* (Toledo, Ohio: D. R. Locke, 1879), 171; William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994), 92; “Report of the sick and wounded amongst the Confederate troops performing guard duty at Camp Sumter, Andersonville, Ga., for the months of July and August, 1864,” *OR*, ser. 2, 8:612; [Col. A. J. H. Duganne], “The Prisoner of War in Texas,” *Beadle's Monthly: A Magazine of To-Day* 1 (Jan. 1866): 42–43.

41. G. K. Johnson, Medical Inspector, U.S. Army, to Joseph K. Barnes, Medical Inspector-General of the Army, Washington, D.C., Mar. 8, 1864, *OR*, ser. 2, 6:1041; C. T. Alexander, Surgeon, U.S. Army, to Col. W. Hoffman, Commissary-General of Prisoners, Fort Delaware, June 28, 1864, *OR*, ser. 2, 7:421. For further commentary—this time from Camp Morton in Indianapolis, another detention complex for Confederate soldiers—that emphasizes nostalgia’s apparent ability to intensify existing common diseases and complaints, see Charles J. Kipp, Surgeon, U.S. Volunteers, to Surg. Charles S. Tripler, Military Prison Hospital, Camp Morgan, Ind., July 30, 1864, *OR*, ser. 2, 7:513.

if they remained” were returned to their homes given the seriousness of their condition.<sup>42</sup> Continual disappointments and frustrations sapped the physical strength and emotional resilience of countless prisoners of war. For those Union soldiers from rural backgrounds, accustomed to roaming around without much oversight or limitation, captivity must have been an especially suffocating experience.

As Surgeon Peters elaborated further, Union soldiers serving in the Deep South, where mail communications were erratic and the climate stifling, suffered more than most. Hospitals in and around New Orleans were apparently “filled with such cases,” predominantly “young men from the Eastern states, whose love of home and kindred is a characteristic trait.” Conversely, cavalymen appeared better equipped to resist nostalgia’s melancholy, in part, we are told, because of the bonds they formed with their horses. Yet, symptoms of this “aberration of the mind” persisted, including—among other complaints—dejection, loss of appetite, and indifference of attitude. If symptoms persisted, warned Peters, additional complications—such as hysterical weeping, headache and sinus pains, anxiety, incontinence and a general lethargy—might be expected. Peters recommended kindness, exercise, a regulated diet, bathing, and other “agreeable associations” to combat and offset nostalgia. According to the surgeon, it was not that nostalgia was difficult to diagnose, at least not in its early stages; rather, patients were sometimes “unwilling to confess [their] mental illness.”<sup>43</sup>

In resisting nostalgia’s temptation to pine for home and its associations, Union soldiers spoke to nineteenth-century ideas of manhood. To admit that one was homesick was to cast doubt over one’s masculinity as well as call into question one’s self-discipline and restraint. If soldier’s duty, a key standard of manhood, was to safeguard home and hearth, then yielding to nostalgia would have had the dual effect of not only violating expectations of manliness but also “feminizing” them to a degree, a worry that came more and more into prominence as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Certainly some soldiers struggled to admit their homesickness amid a range of fears, from gentle ribbing to insinuations against their manliness. An Illinois soldier, for example, discerned a “quiet thoughtfulness” upon the facial expressions of his fellow

42. C. T. Alexander, Surgeon, U.S. Army, to Col. W. Hoffman, Commissary-General of Prisoners, Indianapolis, Ind., Aug. 6, 1864, *OR*, ser. 2, 7:555; “Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to investigate the condition and treatment of prisoners of war,” *OR*, ser. 2, 8:339.

43. Peters, “Remarks,” 75–76.



comrades during a train journey as they each contemplated the many changes they had gone through since the beginning of the war. While many of them were “really homesick,” they “were too proud to acknowledge it. I felt a little homesick myself, couldn’t help it,” noted the soldier, “but would not have acknowledged it at that time for anything.” As George C. Rable has written, when families narrated their distance from each other, soldiers—while obviously hoping to return to loved ones with health intact—had to reconcile “a powerful sense of duty” with “a gnawing fear of dying far from home.” In a moment of hushed contemplation, there swept over Minnesota officer James A. Wright an “intense longing for home and its associations,” the like of which he had rarely experienced before. What made the bout of homesickness all the more distressing was Wright’s “pretty strong conviction” that he would “never see my home again or look into the faces of those I had left there.” This “acute attack of *nostalgia*” overwhelmed the soldier “so forcibly and suddenly” as to reduce him to tears (“but I was careful not to let anyone know it”). Regaining his composure, Wright finally reasoned himself “into a more hopeful state of mind” before he fell asleep, but not before he reprimanded himself for allowing his emotions to overwhelm him: “I was acting more like a silly, sentimental boy than the sensible soldier I ought to be.”<sup>44</sup>

As Jennifer Travis has shown, Civil War doctors did not so much occasion a cure for “emotionally damaged men” as a careful listing of their symptoms. Moreover, doctors were keen not to offend masculine sensibilities and strove to invent an “inoffensive terminology” to describe psychological illnesses, as Elaine Showalter has identified among middle-class men and their nervous disorders during the opening decades of the twentieth century. Categorizing an American male as ‘hysterical,’ for example, was not only an affront to his masculinity but might foster unwelcome insinuations of homosexuality and effeminateness; just as doctors struggled to diagnose the ailment, patients recoiled at the diagnosis.<sup>45</sup>

Other Union soldiers flatly denied homesickness. “I do not get homesick,

44. Reid, *Vacant Chair*, chap. 1; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 12, 233, 262–65; John M. King, Jan., 1863, in *Three Years With the 92nd Illinois: The Civil War Diary of John M. King*, ed. Claire E. Swedberg (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1999), 17; George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 405; and Wright, *No More Gallant a Deed*, 328–29.

45. Jennifer Travis, *Wounded Hearts: Masculinity, Law, and Literature in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005), 31–32; Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), 63, 65.

though when the war is closed none will be more glad to get home than myself,” wrote twenty-one year old George F. Cram to his mother from winter camp in Tennessee. The Illinois soldier reiterated his resistance to homesickness (“I believe we should today have one half the men with us, who are now dead, had they not given way to homesickness”) and his expectation of returning home soon in another letter to his mother on New Year’s Day 1863. By mid-January, “disease [had] thinn[ed] [the] ranks fearfully” and there was only one healthy doctor to attend the medical needs of the entire regiment. “Discharged soldiers are going home every week, and what the end of the 105th will be is difficult to see,” mused Cram. Death and the sequestering of friends left Cram alone in his tent and he saw much unhappiness as he looked out across the remnants of his regiment. “The boys are as a general thing terribly homesick and talk of nothing but home, home,” he reported. “Many of them lay in their tents and brood over it, thus inviting disease.” Disaffected soldiers were “applying for discharges by dozens,” and Cram reckoned many “would be glad to end the war upon *almost any terms of compromise*” Homesickness, however, was still to be resisted. “I never for a moment allow myself to think of being homesick and keep constantly busy about something, which I find the best preventative for it.”<sup>46</sup>

Wright agreed. “Constant employment and something to interest and take up the mind are the best possible antidotes” to homesickness, he counseled. Indeed, others claimed simply not to have the time to give credence to such thoughts amid the realities of war. “Perhaps soldiers think of home more when idle, but I doubt if they suffer any more from homesickness,” wrote a war correspondent to his local paper in Vermont. “If they do it is because that during a tedious campaign, homesickness is drowned by trials more stern and severe.” James K. Newton, an infantryman with the 14th Wisconsin, gently chided his father for worrying unnecessarily about his younger son. “I was afraid that [Samuel] would be rather lowspirited & homesick, considering the manner in which he came into the service, but I found him anything but homesick,” assuaged Newton. “When time passes off as fast as that to a Soldier, he hasn’t time to be homesick.”<sup>47</sup>

46. George F. Cram to his Mother, Dec. 5, 1862, Jan. 1, 1864, and Jan. 19, 1864, all in *Soldiering with Sherman: Civil War Letters of George F. Cram*, ed. Jennifer Cain Bohrnstedt (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 2000), 23, 35, 37–38.

47. Wright, *No More Gallant a Deed*, 90; Wilbur Fisk to Montpelier Green Mountain Freeman, Dec. 31, 1863, *Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861–1865*, ed. Emil Rosenblatt and Ruth Rosenblatt (1983; repr., Lawrence: Univ. Press

J. Theodore Calhoun, assistant surgeon of the U. S. Army, who considered the disease among those serving in the field, further investigated the dynamics of nostalgia. As Peters had done, Calhoun underscored the need for a better recruitment policy, declaring that nostalgia thrived among those who had hurried to sign up; inappropriate enlistments who lost quickly all their previous enthusiasm for war. “Soon came a yearning to go home,” observed Calhoun, “they longed again for the luxuries to which they had been accustomed, a good bed, a cheerful fireside and the delicacies of the table.” Undeniably, copious entries in diaries and notes scribbled in journals speak powerfully to the buoyancy and enthusiasm among adolescent enlistees who marched off to war overflowing with idealistic posturing, eager to prove their mettle in face of the enemy. George M. Turner, a sergeant in Company A, 3d Rhode Island Artillery, wrote from Hilton Head, South Carolina, to his cousin a few months after the commencement of the Civil War. “You write that you think of me often, as so do I of you, and the rest of the dear ones at home; but not as a homesick person would, for I am in too glorious a cause to be homesick; No Sir, you will not find this child homesick, if he does have to endure some hardships.” Yet the experience of many frontline soldiers not only spoke to physical and material deprivation but also entailed loss of personal autonomy as well as subjugation to regimental discipline. Indeed, never-ending marches and drills, guard duty, the protracted tedium of camp life, the endless rumors and hearsay filtering in and out of camps regarding Confederate whereabouts, often scarce foodstuffs and general supplies, invariably inclement weather, and all the other discomforts and hardships ensured initial zest and zeal melted away quickly—the greater the monotony the greater the longing for home, hearth, and happier times.<sup>48</sup>

To make matters worse, the Yankees were an “emphatically letter-writing

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of Kansas, 2002), 182; Jas. K. Newton to his Father, Feb. 17, [18]65, in *A Wisconsin Boy in Dixie: The Selected Letters of James K. Newton*, ed. Stephen E. Ambrose (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 141–42.

48. J. Theodore Calhoun, “Nostalgia as a Disease of Field Service,” *Medical and Surgical Reporter* 11 (Feb. 27, 1864): 130; George M. Turner to his cousin, Dec. 15, 1861, in *Yankee Correspondence: Civil War Letters between New England Soldiers and the Home Front*, ed. Nina Silber and Mary Beth Sievens (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1996), 84. Moreover, exposure to and the distinct possibility of death served only to intensify soldiers’ longings for home. On the carnage of the Civil War and efforts to understand the meaning of some 620,000 deaths, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008); and Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008).

army,” and this steady stream of correspondence, asserted Calhoun, served only “to keep vividly before the imagination the home scenes and home ties.”<sup>49</sup> In keeping with received wisdoms, Calhoun also concluded that soldiers from the country were at greater risk of developing nostalgia than urban dwellers, and he favored a more generous policy toward obtaining furloughs to combat its morose effects. Calhoun also noted that battle or the preparation for battle seemed to offer something of a cure to both individuals and regiments where nostalgia was prevalent: if inactivity favored nostalgia’s evolution, active campaigning stifled it. Chancellorsville, he declared, had alleviated the encroaching symptoms of homesickness among a regiment of raw recruits (“they fought nobly—they won a name—they had something to be proud of”) and instilled in them a previously lacking esprit de corps.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, as Mark Dunkelman found in his psychological study of the battle-hardened 154th New York Volunteer Infantry that soldiers’ fidelity toward their regiment fostered a conspicuous togetherness and motivated individuals in ways that lessened the privations and irritations of military life and the torment of combat. “Already bound by community, occupational, ethnic, and family ties, friendship came easily to the soldiers of the 154th and offered fertile ground for the growth of esprit de corps.” Moreover, comradeship and camaraderie could certainly chase away bouts of homesickness, as Alva Merrill explained in a letter to his mother. “You better believe that I and Horace takes a lot of comfort together,” he wrote of his tent companion. “If one gets any good thing the other has half[.] I dont know what I should do without him[.] I know I would be homesick without him.” As Dunkelman

49. Calhoun, “Nostalgia,” 130–31. To be sure, the importance of mail call for Civil War soldiers should not be underestimated. News from home could boost morale and lift flagging spirits. As Patricia L. Richard, *Busy Hands: Images of the Family in the Northern Civil War Effort* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2003) explains: “Homesick soldiers craved the details of family life that made them feel special and gave their lives direction and meaning” (111). For an example of the importance of mail to an Iowa regiment, from the pen of a regimental historian, see A. F. Sperry, *History of the 33rd Iowa Infantry Volunteer Regiment, 1863–6*, ed. Gregory J. W. Urwin and Cathy Kunzinger Urwin (1866; repr., Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1999), 91–92. See also McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 132–33; and Robertson, *Soldiers*, 5, 104–10, 241n10.

50. Calhoun, “Nostalgia,” 131–32. Calhoun’s medical colleagues largely agreed with his findings, and their considered judgments were published in the following issue as a “Discussion on Nostalgia,” *Medical and Surgical Reporter* 11 (Mar. 5, 1864): 150–52. Albert Deutsch conveniently summarizes the ruminations of both Peters and Calhoun in “Military Psychiatry: The Civil War, 1861–1865,” in Hall, *One Hundred Years of American Psychiatry*, 373–77.

explains, tied by the bonds of friendship, acquaintances became surrogate families, tents impromptu homes, the encampment a neighborhood.<sup>51</sup>

For his part, Calhoun also favored a generous furlough system as a concession to nostalgic soldiers desperate to return home. Citing with approval a furlough scheme adopted by General Hooker, “in which furloughs were granted as rewards,” Calhoun discerned improvements in both morale and hygiene. “Let a man know that by good conduct he will sooner or later become entitled to a furlough, and he won’t be home-sick; neither will he have the incentive to desert.” Such a system was open to abuse, however. A high-ranking Union surgeon stormed: “If men can be sure of being sent home by being thrown upon the hands of the medical director of this army, the contagion of homesickness will spread till there is not a sound man left here to carry a musket.” An Iowa sergeant, in noting the homesick soldiers among his regiment hoping to be granted a thirty day sick furlough, doubted the sincerity of their requests, especially when compared alongside his own medical history. “I am in good health and it is more than a year since I have had to report to the doctor, and then he marked me ‘not fit for duty’ for only three days.” A system similar to that proposed by Calhoun was also apt to breed disappointment and jealousy among those who were granted leave and those who were not. Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, a young farm girl from New York who served in the 153rd New York Infantry under an alias and disguised as a man, wrote her parents of her homesickness. “There is some of our men that have got a furlough and gone home,” she explained. She doubted her own luck in receiving a furlough however, noting the preference officers gave married men. In camp near Murfreesboro during the summer and fall of 1863, many homesick soldiers of the 85th Indiana met the rejection of their furlough requests with frustration. After the mustering of their regiment, the 20th Iowa Infantry was dispatched to camp where, within a few days, “the novelty of camp life . . . lost its charms” and “a spirit of ennui seized both officers and men, and ‘homesick’ began to prevail in its epidemic form throughout the camp.” Many applications for furloughs were requested, and although several of these requests were successful, those more unfortunate denounced “what they termed ‘red tape’” with venomous invective.<sup>52</sup>

51. Mark H. Dunkleman, *Brothers One and All: Esprit de Corps in a Civil War Regiment* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2004), 75.

52. Calhoun, “Nostalgia,” 132; Charles S. Trippler to Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, May 17, 1862, *OR*, ser. 1, 11:204; Alexander G. Downing, Aug. 17, 1863, in *Downing’s Diary*, ed. Olynthus B. Clark (Des Moines: Iowa State Department of History and Archives, 1916), 135;

In addition to granting furloughs, sending men home, and keeping the mind active, various other measures against nostalgia were taken to treat the afflicted and restore their health. For Calhoun, nostalgia was “an affection of the mind” and had to be treated as such. “Any influence that will render the patient more manly,” he claimed, “will exercise a curative power.” This more often than not equated to willpower and similar maxims that espoused manliness. As Sergeant Wright stated: “Of course, we realized that there was a limit to the power of will, as in other things, but what was called ‘having grit’ and ‘keeping a stiff upper lip’ under adverse conditions did seem to help out wonderfully sometimes.” Wright presumed that any veteran of the conflict could cite examples of former comrades who had either grown “discouraged and seemed to ‘give it up’ and died” or “pulled through because they had more ‘sand.’”<sup>53</sup>

Recalling his incarceration in Virginia prisons, George Putnam firmly believed that “will power, the decision to live if possible, the unwillingness to give up, beaten by the Confederacy or by circumstance” saved many Union officers during the final months of the war. Writing from the family farm near Ripley, Ohio, on the Ohio River, Andrew Evans counseled his son on ways to resist nostalgia. “So long as you can continue cheerful, in good spirits and take all by the bright side, you will all enjoy fair health, but so sure as the Army gets hold of the dark side of all things, take the ‘blues,’ get homesick and complain of all things, then the upper lip ceases to be stiff, the sphincter muscle relaxed, then indeed you would cease to be a formidable body of soldiers and subject yourselves to the ravages of which would make you an easy prey to the enemy.”<sup>54</sup> In individual cases of homesickness, Calhoun reckoned “the patient can often be laughed out of it by his comrades.” As one veteran soldier noted of younger recruits: “They are beginning to talk of goin home so quick. We old solgers laf at them and tell them that home is

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[Sarah] Rosetta Wakeman to her Father, Sept. 20, [18]63, in *An Uncommon Soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, alias Private Lyons Wakeman 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers*, ed. Lauren Cook Burgess (Pasadena, Md.: Minerva Center, 1994), 47; Frank Welcher and Larry G. Liggett, eds., *Coburn's Brigade: 85th Indiana, 33rd Indiana, 19th Michigan, and 22nd Wisconsin in the Western Civil War* (Carmel: Guild Press of Indiana, 1999), 130; and Chester Barney, *Recollections of Field Service with the Twentieth Iowa Infantry Volunteers; or, What I Saw in the Army . . .* (Davenport, [Iowa?]: by the author, 1865), 17.

53. Calhoun, “Nostalgia,” 132; Wright, *No More Gallant a Deed*, 138.

54. Putnam, *Prisoner of War*, 49–50; Andrew to Sam, Apr. 5, 1863, in *Their Patriotic Duty: The Civil War Letters of the Evans Family of Brown County, Ohio*, ed. Robert F. Engs and Corey M. Brooks (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2007), 120.

fool to this place[.]” Some members of the 6th Connecticut created a glee club—others a literary society—to alleviate their homesickness while they sat around in Beaufort, South Carolina. Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, a Federal regiment comprising former slaves, the first of its kind, told of a “new Convalescent Camp” in Saint Augustine, Florida, “whither they send homesick officers to cure them by contraries—getting them farther from home.” In Philadelphia, a Soldiers’ Reading Room was opened in fall 1862 and promised sick, wounded, and homesick Union soldiers a warm welcome and the use of sundry recreational facilities. It was hoped the convivial atmosphere would also negate the twin temptations of gambling and drinking.<sup>55</sup>

Any remedies that purported to cure the problem of homesickness, however, were not always so transparent. A nurse had informed Wright that homesickness was so prevalent among Union soldiers “as to counteract all of the good effects of medicine and nursing.” Besides, not everyone was sympathetic to those afflicted with nostalgia’s scourge. A homesick seventeen-year-old soldier from Iowa who bolted from his camp was tried at court martial upon his capture. “I just wanted to see my mother,” was his sorry plea. The teenager was put to death by a firing squad and buried on the banks of Georgia’s Oconee River.<sup>56</sup>

Other, sometimes exaggerated, comments testify not only to nostalgia’s ubiquitous presence but also imply that any attempt to cure the malady an exercise in futility. During a camp inspection, sullen members of the 18th Massachusetts began to speculate as to the whereabouts of their next campaign, the prospect of which allowed homesickness to settle “over all like the chilling fog clouds so prevalent during a Virginia winter.” In noting the appalling sanitary conditions in camp, overflowing hospitals, lengthy sick

55. Calhoun, “Nostalgia,” 132; Alfred [Holcomb] to his Sister, Oct. 7, [1862], in *The Long Road for Home: The Civil War Experiences of Four Farmboy Soldiers of the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts Regiment of Volunteer Infantry as Told by Their Personal Correspondence, 1861–1865*, ed. Henry C. Lind (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1992), 111; Stephen V. Ash, *Firebrand of Liberty: The Story of Two Black Regiments that Changed the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Norton, 2008), 136–37; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Nov. 6, 1863, in *The Complete Civil War Journal and Selected Letters of Thomas Wentworth Higginson*, ed. Christopher Looby (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 171–72; The Print and Photograph Department of the Library Company of Philadelphia, *City Center Philadelphia in the 19th Century* (Philadelphia: Arcadia, 2006), 15.

56. Wright, *No More Gallant a Deed*, 326; Emmy E. Werner, *Reluctant Witnesses: Children’s Voices from the Civil War* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1998), 120–21.

lists, and flagging morale, an Iowa lieutenant was not surprised to discover “that many good soldiers were possessed of a *homesickness* . . . that amounted almost to a mania.” A Union army assistant surgeon with the 81st New York Volunteers recalled homesickness as “the most pitiless monster that ever hung about a human heart” in his memoirs. “It killed as many in our army as did the bullets of the enemy.”<sup>57</sup>

Humiliation on the battlefield, disastrous losses, and defeat on the back of ill-conceived strategy from unprepared commanding officers likewise fed homesickness among Union troops. In his oft-quoted diary, Cyrus F. Boyd of the 15th Iowa Infantry reflected on the “great *disaster*” at Shiloh in April 1862. As the regiment counted the cost of the bloody two-day battle from camp, Boyd noted with dismay: “Almost all sick and the *blues* prevail in the most malignant form.” In February the following year, nostalgia’s malevolent presence was still felt in camp. “More men *die* of homesickness than all other diseases—and when a man gives up and lies down he is a *goner*,” warned Boyd. “How sad it is to see the boys looking down in the face and a ‘want to go home’ looking countenance on them,” understated an Ohio artilleryman in his diary after the same battle. Suspicious of the large numbers of men claiming illness and sickness after Shiloh when some eleven thousand Union soldiers were evacuated by boats fitted out by state governors and volunteer organizations, the medical authorities, observing with much alarm that “it was found impossible to prevent the flocking on board of many whose only complaint was nostalgia,” favored better regulated evacuation policies that would differentiate sharply between genuine cases and malingerers.<sup>58</sup>

Even seemingly unimportant remembered associations with home and family life could trigger bouts of homesickness among Union soldiers. Soldiers

57. John J. Hennessy, ed., *Fighting with the Eighteenth Massachusetts: The Civil War Memoir of Thomas H. Mann* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2000), 130; S. D. Thompson, *Recollections with the Third Iowa Regiment* (Cincinnati: by the author, 1864), 258; and Carrington Macfarlane, *Reminiscences of an Army Surgeon* (Oswego, N.Y.: Lake City Print Shop, 1912), 73.

58. Cyris F. Boyd, Apr. 13, [1862], Apr. 14, [1862], and Feb. 16, [1863], all in *The Civil War Diary of Cyrus F. Boyd, Fifteenth Iowa Infantry, 1861–1863*, ed. Mildred Thorne (1953; repr., Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Reprint, 1977), 42, 43, 125; Joseph Allan Frank and George A. Reaves, “*Seeing the Elephant*”: *Raw Recruits at the Battle of Shiloh* (1989; repr., Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2003), 125; “Account of the Campaign of the Army of the Tennessee, from February to June, 1862, including the capture of Forts Henry and Donelson, and the Battles of Shiloh and Corinth by Surgeon John H. Brinton, U.S.V., Medical Director of the Army of the Tennessee,” in Barnes, *Medical and Surgical History*, vol. 1, 1:33. On malingering and feigning illness in this context, see Anderson and Anderson, “Nostalgia and Malingering,” 161–65; and Clarke, “So Lonesome I Could Die,” 264–65.



in an Iowa regiment were plunged into despair when they noticed telegraph wires “which had called up recollections of home” as they marched solemnly past. Taking a rest from skirmish duties in Louisiana, another Union soldier thought of home as he wondered what the future held. At that moment a Baltimore oriole flew past and perched on a branch near the contemplative soldier. Presuming the bird had fled its nest during an exchange of skirmish fire and had returned safely after the din subsided, the soldier accepted the incident as an encouraging omen. “After this struggle is over, I, too, may return to friends and home,” he hoped.<sup>59</sup> Following a sermon in camp, a few members of the 1st Minnesota Volunteers went for an afternoon stroll and sat for a while staring out across the Potomac and over to the outlying mountains, thinking of home until they were “heartsick and homesick.” Certainly, religious services were especially apt to induce nostalgia among individuals and assembled congregations in camp. A couple of months after the outbreak of war, Allen Geer of the 20th Illinois attended his first Sunday sermon in camp. In contrasting the outdoor service with the more traditional preaching methods he was used to, the soldier commented, “Everything seemed so very different from home that a sense of desperate homesickness came over me.”<sup>60</sup> As homesick soldiers idled away weeks and months in camp, thoughts often drifted toward food or invoked memories of much-missed luxuries to which they had once been accustomed. “A genuine case of downright home-sickness is most depressing,” opined Leander Stillwell of the 61st Illinois. Of his campmates in northeast Mississippi, he noted: “The boys had not learned how to cook [and] the poor fellows would sit around in their tents, and whine, and talk about home, and what good things they would have there to eat, and kindred subjects, until apparently they lost every spark of energy.” Not even the distraction of preparing food could eliminate homesickness. A regimental historian wrote of some soldiers who made griddlecakes, pies, custards, and cheeses in an effort to free themselves “from the grip of nostalgia, or homesickness” with mixed success.<sup>61</sup>

As Hofer’s Swiss mercenaries did attest, music could generate nostalgia too.

59. Barney, *Recollections*, 96; [Anonymus], “Thoughts of Home,” in Moore, *Anecdotes*, 353.

60. Wright, *No More Gallant a Deed*, 212; Steven E. Woodworth, *While God Is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2001), 183–84.

61. William C. Davis, *A Taste for War: The Culinary History of the Blue and the Gray* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 2003), 110; Alfred Seelye Roe, *The Ninth New York Heavy Artillery: A History of its Organization, Services in the Defenses of Washington, Marches, Camps, Battles, and Muster-Out . . .* (Worcester, Mass.: by the author, 1899), 56–57.

William R. Ray, a former blacksmith who volunteered with the 7th Wisconsin Infantry, confided to his journal on New Year's Day 1865 that the "sweet strains of music" wafting in and around camp "made me think of home & how it would be to be there," although he barred himself from dwelling "too long on such Pleasures for fear that I might get homesick & that is a disease I have been fortunate as not to have much while I have been in the service." Similarly, Bostonian Charles Russell Lowell, writing to his wife a month before his death at Cedar Creek, noted from camp that the band there "were quite sentimental in their choice of music, and I grew as homesick as possible." A German American volunteer explained that every time he penned a letter to his parents he experienced an almost irresistible urge to "sing along" to the German romantic poet Heinrich Heine's "The Homecoming," which was set to music in the late 1830s and perhaps more familiar as the Lorelei song. "I cannot determine the meaning of sorrow that fills my breast," confessed the soldier. "Sometimes I think it's homesickness, although I'm too old for that, but who knows!" A Union prisoner-of-war remembered many "of the quieter not to say sadder variety" of songs—"Mother, Will You Miss Me?" and "Home, Sweet Home"—that he and his fellow inmates used to sing from behind their prison walls. "Home, Sweet Home" was certainly an emotive song for both Union and Confederate soldiers, so much so that regimental bands were sometimes prohibited from playing it.<sup>62</sup>

Special occasions and significant anniversaries or holidays provoked expressions of homesickness too. "The boys were mighty blue" on Thanksgiving Day, exclaimed a Massachusetts officer to his sister, adding: "I was homesick as a dog." An Ohio soldier spent his twenty-fifth birthday far from home in Alabama, "homesick and want[ing] a letter from my wife." "How we should like to be home for Class Day," wrote Lt. Herbert Mason from his trench, while pondering the aftermath of the Battle of Fair Oaks Station in June 1862. "It makes my mouth water to think of the strawberry ice & wine in this hot weather to say nothing of . . . the dance on the green, music, the parties from

62. William R. Ray, Jan. 1, 1865, in *Four Years with the Iron Brigade: The Civil War Journals of William R. Ray, Co. E, Seventh Wisconsin Infantry*, ed. Lance Herdegen and Sherry Murphy (New York: Da Capo, 2002), 351; Edward Waldo Emerson, ed., *Life and Letters of Charles Russell Lowell* (1907; repr., Columbia: Univ. South Carolina Press, 2005), 345; Friedrich Martens to Most dearly beloved parents, in *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006), 323; Putnam, *Prisoner of War*, 39. See also Dixon Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside, 1944), 127, 157; and Larry M. Logue, *To Appomattox and Beyond: The Civil War Soldier in War and Peace* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 36.

our friends &c. It is a day which is hard to miss.” Malarial and increasingly desperate for his father to send him quinine, the Harvard senior, along with his Massachusetts regiment, for several days had endured heavy rain, which had exposed the bodies of fallen comrades and filled the air with a revolting stench, an ordeal that had done nothing to allay their homesickness. “The homesickness wh. I mentioned in my last they say is just one of the first symptoms of scurvy,” wrote another soldier of the same regiment. By mid-June, over half the regiment were laid up with sickness and disease.<sup>63</sup>

Soldiers were probably reminded of home more at Christmas time than at any other period in the year. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the Christmas season was witness to an increase in applications for furloughs. Christmas tends to assume a strong sense of significance in times of protracted conflict, especially when the meaning of Christmas itself is clouded. That this is the case was not lost on northern soldiers during the Civil War. In the aftermath of the Union disaster at Fredericksburg, for example, and with Christmas approaching, some Yankees clutched at and reflected upon Christmas messages of peace and goodwill during their encampment on the banks of the Rappahannock River. Likewise, Col. Charles Manderson of the 19th Ohio noted with unease an “all-pervading complaint” of homesickness in camp at Christmas. Looking out from his tent upon his morose comrades, he observed men whispering to each other of absent friends and family members and sharing other memories.<sup>64</sup>

Writing in the early 1880s, W. A. Hammond, surgeon general of the United States during the Civil War and a pioneer in the study of nervous and mental diseases in America, highlighted nostalgia as “worthy of some special consideration,” observing “a great many cases” during the conflict. Moreover, in an address to the Physicians’ Club of Chicago in 1913, S. Weir Mitchell, another pioneer in the study of nervous impairments at Turner’s Lane Hospital in Philadelphia during the Civil War and subsequent specialist

63. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* 120; F. M. McAdams, *Every-Day Soldier Life, or A History of the One Hundred and Thirteenth Ohio Volunteer Infantry* (Columbus, Ohio: Chas. M. Cott and Co., 1884), 46; Richard F. Miller, *Harvard’s Civil War: A History of the Twentieth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry* (Lebanon, N.H.: Univ. Press of New England, 2005), 134–35.

64. J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1986), 113; Daniel E. Sutherland, *Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville: The Dare Mark Campaign* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1998), 78; Francis Augustin O’Reilly, *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2003), 462; and Peter Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die: The Battle of Stones River* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1990), 44.

in neurology, testified too of nostalgia's Civil War ubiquity, regretting that no detailed research was undertaken to shed light on the condition.<sup>65</sup> Historians have only just begun to afford detailed attention to homesickness among Civil War combatants in a few select studies. Undoubtedly, further research will add to our understanding of the psychology of Civil War soldiers as well as shed more light on Civil War-era preventative medicine that lacked the knowledge to care satisfactorily for or cure those stricken with homesickness. By continuing to reveal the emotional sensitivity in the testimony of Civil War fighting men toward home we may gain a greater understanding of what the war meant to participants as well as illuminate facets of their domestic experience. Today's American soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan (and those stationed elsewhere around the globe) depend on phone calls, text messaging, e-mail, online networking sites, and webcams (among other technologies) to stay in touch with friends and loved ones, to maintain close contact with home and the outside world. For Civil War soldiers denied such fantastic technologies and gadgetry, handwritten letters and tender care packages from family members and friends at home were especially valued. Home is, after all, where the heart is.

65. W. A. Hammond, *A Treatise on Insanity in Its Medical Relations* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1883), 411; S. Weir Mitchell, "The Medical Department in the Civil War," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 62 (May 9, 1914): 1449. That said, nostalgia was detected among many military personnel—especially young naval recruits—during World War Two. On this point, see C. L. Whitson, H. I. Harris, and W. A. Hunt, "Cryptic Nostalgia," *War Medicine* 3 (1943): 57–59; and David J. Flicker and Paul Weiss, "Nostalgia and its Military Implications," *War Medicine* 4 (1943): 383–87. See also Rosen, "Nostalgia," 29. Writing some five years after Mitchell and fresh from the experience of observing hospital practices in both England and France during the First World War, neurologist and psychiatrist Pearce Bailey hypothesized that sufferers of nostalgia may well have comprised some of the six hundred thousand instances of absenteeism in the Union army during the Civil War. Pearce Bailey, "War Neuroses, Shell Shock, and Nervousness in Soldiers," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 71 (Dec. 28, 1918): 2149.

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