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Let Him Be an Honor to the Country: Veteran Violence and Public Opinion after the Civil War

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Let Him Be an Honor to the Country: Veteran Violence and Public Opinion after the Civil War

Let Him Be an Honor to the Country: Veteran Violence and Public Opinion after the Civil War

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History

by

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Harding University
Bachelor of Arts in History and English, 2013

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

This study examines the causes, perception, and treatment of violence and crime committed by veterans after America's Civil War. After an examination of the research problems plaguing the study of violence and crime among veterans, this study uses newspaper articles, tracts and sermons, the published journals and letters of Union and Confederate soldiers, and other contemporary sources to evaluate the presence and perception of violence and the hardships associated with the homecoming of veterans. Alcohol and drug addiction that began during the war followed veterans home. Discipline in the army was inconsistent, and violence abounded in camp as well as on the battlefield. Combat was psychologically traumatic for some soldiers, and they returned to communities that struggled to deal with veteran misbehavior and mental trauma. Brutal suicides and violent outbursts forced veterans into soldiers' homes, asylums, and prisons, but these unfit facilities were last resorts for men with no place in society and no options. For many veterans, readjustment would prove a struggle more complicated and disheartening than the war itself.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are extended to Dr. Daniel Sutherland, who patiently read and revised many segments of this thesis before its completion. His encouragement fueled my interest in this topic, and I could not have completed the thesis without his help.

Also, a special thanks goes out to Dr. Beth Schweiger, Dr. Kathryn Sloan, and Dr. Patrick Williams. Their advice and unique research fields provided a map to many sources I would not have known otherwise.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father, who taught me about history and gave me every opportunity to make a career from its study. I drank from a well that I did not dig, and I can never repay his investment in me.

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I. Introduction

In the winter of 1862, a young Illinois soldier by the name of Charles Wills wrote home to his sister. He had much on his mind. A clean-cut and religious man, Wills frequently mentioned the deplorable moral conditions of the army in his letters home. Like many other soldiers, Wills feared the effect of war conditions on the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of his generation. “The army is becoming awfully depraved,” he wrote. “How the civilized home folks will ever be able to live with them after the war, is, I think, something of a question.”¹ Though Wills was primarily concerned with the army’s general lack of order and religious devotion, his words raised an interesting query even in the first few months of the Civil War. How would war affect the soldier, and how would the veteran readjust to civilian life?

It is universally acknowledged that the Civil War transformed America politically, economically, and militarily. Historians have devoted countless volumes to the study of every aspect of the war, from the decisions of national leaders to the suffering of the slave, but few scholars have examined how the war affected those who fought it. We know that war has a cost that cannot be measured in gold or even blood, but few attempts have been made to examine the full extent of that cost.² What was the effect of the violence experienced during those bloody years, and did the desperation and aggression of those volatile times legitimize violence in the

¹ Charles Wright Wills to Mary Emily Wills, Provost Marshal’s Office, Waterford, MS, December 12, 1862, in *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier Including a Day-by-Day Record of Sherman’s March to the Sea: Letters and Diary of Charles W. Wills*, ed. Mary E. Kellogg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 136.

² Megan Kate Nelson’s *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012) is one of the books that examines the toll the Civil War took on America’s landscape and people. She addresses how the burning of cities and forests and the destruction of soldier’s bodies sparked contemporary discussion about the effect of modern warfare on the environment and the human identity.

decades after? Contemporary sources suggested that some veterans navigated the emotionally and physically stressful postwar years with the behaviors they learned on the battlefield. This was survival during the war, but it was perceived as a penchant for violence and too often for crime in the decades that followed.

It would be easy to argue that men who experienced difficult readjustments formed a minority of the soldiering population, and that most veterans returned home, lived their lives, and died without committing a single violent act or crime. The purpose of this study, however, is to examine how some men were altered by army life and the consequences for both the men and their communities. While many scholars have explored the depravity of the army or the horrifying conditions of battle, few have traced these factors beyond the war. This work attempts to unite scholarship on postwar violence, crime, addiction, and mental illness with the literature on wartime efforts at spiritual and behavioral improvement to show how both may help to explain the problems many Civil War soldiers faced when they returned to civilian life.³

³ Civil War scholarship, which has been fascinated with the wartime experience of Union and Confederate soldiers since the publication of Bell Irvin Wiley's landmark books, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943) and *The Life of Billy Yank* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), has broadened its perspective in the past decade or so to examine how Union and Confederate veterans adjusted to postwar life. The most important of these works include James Alan Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), Lesley Jill Gordon, *A Broken Regiment: The 16th Connecticut's Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), Brian Matthew Jordan, *Marching Home: Union Veterans and Their Unending Civil War* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014), R.B. Rosenberg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), Eric T. Dean, *Shook over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), Larry M. Logue and Michael Barton, *The Civil War Veteran: A Historical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), and Rusty Williams, *My Old Confederate Home: A Respectable Place for Civil War Veterans* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010). In addition, Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004) and Barbara A. Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradship in the Grand Army of*

This study is divided into four parts. Part one will explain the research problems associated with discussing crime among Civil War veterans and the trends in nineteenth-century violence and crime before and after the war. Part two will show how the prevalence of alcohol and drugs in the armies threatened the societal values of both the North and South while increasing the ex-soldier's propensity for addiction and violence. Part three will explain how authorities dealt with disciplinary problems during and after the war and investigate associated changes in the management of postwar prisons and mental hospitals. Finally, part four will examine combat-induced mental trauma and the perception of spontaneous violence and suicide in the postwar era. A careful look at each of these factors will paint a clearer picture of the veteran's readjustment experience.

One last explanation for this study remains to be offered, and it deals with the use of both Confederate and Union sources. While both sides of the conflict retained separate convictions about why they fought and what the outcome should be, both North and South endeavored to address the spiritual and disciplinary problems of their soldiers in ways more similar than different. Substance abuse and violence after the war were not sectional problems, so a sectional study is not necessary at this juncture. This study endeavors to guide scholarship on postwar violence and psychological trauma in a new direction. The provoking issue noted by Charles Wills in the first lurches of war must finally be examined. How did these boys come home, and how did they pick up their lives after such an absence? Moreover, how did their communities react to veteran misbehavior? At least for some veterans, readjustment would prove a struggle more complicated and disheartening than the war itself.

the Republic (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011) treat the postwar lives of black Union soldiers. Of these books, Marten has the most to say about crime and violence.

II. Evidences Still Less Direct: Research Problems and Trends in Nineteenth-Century Violence and Crime

In the spring of 1919, historian Carl Fish published one of the first articles on the postwar adjustment of Civil War veterans. Optimistically titled, “Back to Peace in 1865,” the article highlighted the positive transition back to civilian life after the armies of the North and South disbanded. Primarily using pension records and other financial sources, Fish drew attention to the monetary compensation soldiers received and used that information as a springboard to his conclusions: “A small amount of money in 1865 smoothed a great deal of rough road.”¹ Fish also argued that accounts of lawlessness by veterans were largely overstated, and the biggest problem the nation faced was economic, not criminal or psychological. “The overwhelming majority [of veterans],” he suggested, “settled down to the quiet life of ordinary citizens, except that some greater proportion than usual felt . . . that the world, or more particularly the country, owed them a living.”² The great search for jobs and unrest over pension claims were the only real difficulties left for veterans after the war.

However, Fish knew that the experience of Civil War veterans was not as simple as his argument. In the same article, he wrote, “Doubtless shell-shock cases existed—we have most of us known veterans probably still suffering from the failure to treat it properly; undoubtedly there were economic and social hardships which might have been ameliorated.” Though Fish was aware of the complexities of veteran readjustment, he concluded the statement by saying, “On the whole the individualistic method, modified by the humane neighborliness which equally

¹ Carl R. Fish, “Back to Peace in 1865,” *American Historical Review* 24, no. 3 (April 1919): 436-437.

² *Ibid.*, 441.

characterized the Americans of the period, did result in the successful absorption of the veterans into civil life.”³

Though Fish’s work made good use of the sources at his disposal, he glossed over the problems experienced by returning soldiers. Almost as an afterthought, Fish commented, “As to the habits, and the spiritual and the physical condition of the men demobilized, one can judge only by evidences still less direct.”⁴ He suggested that battle had left soldiers bitterly disillusioned by war, but that was as far as his conceptual musings would take him. Facing the trickle of World War I veterans returning to civilian life, Fish clearly believed that a lesson in postwar adjustment could be gained from the Civil War. Things would work out if the financial needs of returning veterans were met.

Fish’s article is representative of the problems historians of postwar adjustment have faced. His focus on an economic evaluation of the veterans’ situation was due in part to the historiographical trends of his time. Studies written during that time period reflected the dominant belief that economic forces drove history. Still, the reason he gave for avoiding the deeper complexities of cultural research was practical. “Some did become unsettled and lawless,” he explained, “but the attempt to proportion the amount of disorder between that resulting from frontier characteristics, and that from the war, is apparently quite futile.”⁵ Fish did not know where to begin to investigate the nameless and invisible turmoil that haunted some of the returning veterans of the Civil War. It was a problem of sources.

A host of obstacles have prevented researchers from properly exploring the veteran’s

³ Ibid., 435.

⁴ Ibid., 441.

⁵ Ibid.

relationship to violence and crime. Court records have always provided a bank of sources for historians researching trends in crime, but they provide a unique problem when dealing with crimes committed by military veterans. Court records from the nineteenth century are often little more than scattered trial notes with little standardization of information. Not compiled with the intention of creating a narrative or providing much detail, they rarely allow one to follow the action of a case. For example, in looking at the Pulaski County court records, I discovered that they stated what the charge was and listed costs incurred, but that was the extent of the information. The likelihood of finding the defendant's occupation at the time of the trial is small, and finding their occupations during the years when they would have seen military service is even smaller.⁶ Similarly, to cross-reference court records with military rosters is a daunting if not impossible task. Ideally for this type of research, court records would be organized first chronologically and then by the last name of the defendant, but this is not generally the case. This means a researcher must blindly search military rosters by defendants' last names in hopes of finding a match that would also coincide chronologically with the years following the war. While one match like this would provide a starting point for an in-depth personal case study, a multitude of these matches would be necessary to build evidence for the prevalence of crime among veterans in a broader sense. It was obvious from the first stages of this study that such an undertaking, at least for the moment, would not be possible.

In the absence of detailed court records, prison reports provide some insight into the

⁶ Pulaski County Court Records, Series 2, Boxes 13-24, Margaret Smith Ross Papers, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. Furthermore, Dr. Elizabeth Smith, a member of the University of Arkansas Department of History who uses court records from Louisiana and other areas in the South to research nineteenth-century prostitution, confirmed for me that court records throughout this period provide limited information regarding the defendant's profession and circumstances surrounding the crime.

actual numbers of convicted veterans. For instance, the *Annual Report of the Inspectors of State Prisons*, a broad survey conducted in 1868, informs us that five male prisoners on the rosters of Sing Sing listed their former occupation as soldier.⁷ That only five of the 1250 prisoners held at the time of the report served during the Civil War seems a remarkably low number. These types of lists struggle to assign numbers to complex meanings. Did these men see themselves as soldiers, or did they continue to see themselves as bakers, teachers, and lawyers whose military service was only a hiatus from their real occupations? Why did they choose to identify themselves as former soldiers at the time of their arrest? Without relentless searching and unlimited time, these questions cannot be answered.

Even without convenient statistical tables about the criminal activities of veterans, this topic is not without a paper trail. Diaries, letters, speeches, newspapers, periodicals, and other types of literature published in the years after the war testify to the perception that crime was a problem for the returning soldier. As early as 1927, the prominent social worker Edith Abbott published a groundbreaking article that described what she called the crime wave of 1865-1870, and she pointed to the many unsettled returning veterans as its precipitators. Wrestling with the same research problems historians of the topic still face today, it was with great frustration that Abbott claimed, “Criminal statistics during and after the Civil War period are not easily collected.”⁸ Even so, Abbott believed the sources arguing that male imprisonment skyrocketed after demobilization in 1865, sources which simultaneously suggested that a large number of

⁷ H. A. Barnum, John Hammond, and S. Scheu, *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Inspectors of State Prisons of the State of New York, Transmitted to the Legislature January 21, 1869* (Albany: Charles Van Benthuysen and Sons, 1869), 70.

⁸ Edith Abbott, “The Civil War and the Crime Wave of 1865-70,” *Social Service Review* 1, no. 2 (June 1, 1927): 215.

those new imprisonments were veterans. A rise in imprisonment could be seen in both the North and South, an aspect she believed worth noting because crime was not only a product of abnormal conditions experienced during a harsh reconstruction in the South. The rise in crime was not a response to a new and stressful political atmosphere, but to something else. Abbott defended her conclusion and her use of sources in the final page of her work by arguing:

Whether or not the prison population was disproportionate to the male population of the country during the years after the war, a fact which it is impossible to prove or disprove statistically, it is clear that even what would have been considered a normal prison population before the war made a new and deep impression upon the public mind now that the occupants of the prisons were the same boys who had flocked to Lincoln's armies and whose sufferings and heroism were a matter of recent memory.⁹

Abbott's article testified that many civilians feared wartime violence would transform the men they sent to battle, and regardless what the numbers were and whether it could be proved, many believed their fear was confirmed in the years after the war.

In 1873, Reverend Daniel Needham stood before the North Middlesex Conference of Unitarian and other Christian Churches to give an address. Though filled with religious purpose, his call to the flock was not on doctrine or faithfulness but on crime and how the church should work to eliminate it. He began by addressing the question which many Americans were asking in the later part of the nineteenth century. Was crime on the rise? He was unsure about the answer. Needham questioned whether the disorderly and unsystematic statistics available could provide definitive proof that crime was rising. Even so, he realized people perceived an increase:

The telegraph now enables the morning and evening press to spread before our eyes the daily record of crime, from the most distant states and the remotest parts of the earth; and our knowledge of crime committed is much more extensive than it was a few years since, when it was limited by the intelligence brought by fewer newspapers and an occasional

⁹ Ibid., 233.

mail, from only a small division of our own country; and what seems an increase may be but the impression received on a wider view.¹⁰

Needham's speech is interesting because it exhibits a truth about crime in the nineteenth century. New technologies were rapidly changing how people experienced criminal activity. The role that the spread of information and the sensationalism of delinquency played during this century cannot be overstated. People saw crime everywhere they looked. If they did not actually see it in the streets of their small towns, they saw it hundreds of miles away in the cities. Local newspapers reprinted national headlines. The same story might be rephrased and rerun a hundred times. It was hard for people of the time to discern what was happening around them, and historians have also struggled to craft narratives from confusing and sometimes contradictory information.

In his work on the development of America's police system, historian David Johnson has also recognized the changing perceptions of crime in the nineteenth century. Urbanization and modernization swept over the United States like a consuming flood. In the rapidly expanding and advancing cities of the time, people felt surrounded by crime. As Johnson observes, "During the first three decades of the century, criminal behavior increasingly seemed to disturb the prevailing tranquility of urban society; in the next three decades, many people became convinced that crime was about to undermine their society. Whether this was in fact true is questionable, but irrelevant, since these people acted upon their belief."¹¹

¹⁰ Daniel Needham and Duane V. Bowen, *The Cause and Prevention of Crime: An Address Delivered at the Session of the North Middlesex Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches at Nashua, N. H., October 22d, 1873* (Ayer: Printed at the Office of the Public Spirit, 1873), 4.

¹¹ David R. Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld: The Impact of Crime on the Development of the American Police, 1800-1887* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 12.

A century and a half has not made the crime situation in the nineteenth century easier to decipher. Historians struggle to find patterns in unsystematic records. The police system as we know it was not organized until 1856, and even after that period each precinct, court, and prison had its own way of documenting crime. As early as 1908, sociologist Ellen Elizabeth Guillot could foresee the difficulties in understanding nineteenth-century crime. In the first chapter of her work, she listed the numerous problems that statistics from the period posed. They were scattered and contradictory. Of the prison, judicial, and police statistics available from the period, she found prison records to be the most abundant. Though she was unsure of their accuracy, she included them because she believed they contributed to public perceptions of crime.¹² Criminologists of the period used prison records to theorize on trends in crime, and men like Daniel Needham cited them in appeals to the public for prison and societal reform.

To further complicate matters, crime varied significantly from one major city to another, and rural crime had its own influences. Race, age, economic situation, gender, and profession contributed to the complexity of criminality everywhere, and it is difficult to take all these factors into account without specific geographic or temporal constraints. The Civil War often serves as an ending or starting point for studies on crime in this period. Therefore, an examination of the century as a whole is uncommon. Little statistical information can be gathered for a broad study on crime in America. It is as difficult for us to comprehend the level of crime in the nineteenth century as it was for those who experienced it, if not more so.

Despite these issues, historians have made headway by taking a localized look at crime.

¹² Ellen Elizabeth Guillot, *Social Factors in Crime as Explained by American Writers of the Civil War and Post Civil War Period* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1943), 24-29.

Studies of crime in such urban centers as Columbus, Philadelphia, and Boston appeared in the 1970s. These were followed by regionalized works that looked at crime at the level of the state or region, especially in such high crime areas as Louisiana and the hills of Appalachia. Largely due to a sectionalized approach to nineteenth-century American history, there are now works that specifically address crime in the South, but few historians claim to see a picture of crime in America as a whole.¹³

Because of these studies, some general statements can be made about crime in the nineteenth century. For example, historian David Papke, in explaining some of the challenges to researchers, gleans some truths from the perplexing data. Though he warns that “for now, the historical studies of nineteenth-century American crime might be used gingerly,” he still maintains that crimes of the antebellum period could typically be categorized in three groups. Crimes against property, disruption of the peace, or interpersonal violence, he contends, characterized the transgressions of most criminals before the Civil War. Perpetrators of personal

¹³ There are several localized studies on crime that have been published in the last fifty years. These are some that have paved the way for broader studies on crime: Eric H. Monkkonen, *The Dangerous Class: Crime and Poverty in Columbus, Ohio, 1860-1885* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), Roger Lane, *Violent Death in the City: Suicide, Accident, and Murder in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), Michael Stephen Hindus, *Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), Gilles Vandal, *Rethinking Southern Violence: Homicides in Post-Civil War Louisiana, 1866-1884*, The History of Crime and Criminal Justice Series (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), Christopher Waldrep and Donald G Nieman, *Local Matters: Race, Crime, and Justice in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), and Bruce E. Stewart, *Blood in the Hills a History of Violence in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012). More general studies on crime have included chapters addressing nineteenth-century crime, such as Randolph Roth, *American Homicide* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009).

violence were typically younger men who were either related to or well-acquainted with their victims. Though this had been the pattern for crime during the first half of the nineteenth century, Papke points to the Civil War as a major turning point.¹⁴

Contemporary sources like the *Memphis Daily Appeal* lamented an increase of crime after the war:

We have been drenched within the past eighteen months by, perhaps, the largest wave of crime that has ever visited this section. . . . Newspapers abroad boasted that they kept the head line, 'Another Murder in Memphis,' standing in type for daily use. Citizens of Memphis on visiting their friends abroad were greeted with wonder and astonishment, and congratulated that they had survived 'another' carnival of crime as it was called, and were safe 'until the next time.'¹⁵

However bad things seemed in Memphis, the city was not alone. Newspapers everywhere delivered tales of horrific violence and murder in black and white. In Colorado, the *Rocky Mountain News* described the crime situation in similar dramatic tones, claiming, "From every point of the compass we hear of but a succession of high-handed outrageous and bloody deeds. Not a newspaper but contains a catalogue of crimes at which the mind shudders to read of, and over which angels must weep." Using dramatic rhetoric heightened anxiety about the possible crime wave, but many believed that the reported instances of murder and violence validated their concerns. "A mere enumeration of the more noted acts of violence that have occurred the past twelve months in different parts of the country is calculated to cause one to fear the future of law and order," the *Rocky Mountain News* concluded.¹⁶

People believed that crimes had more than increased; they argued that the nature of crime

¹⁴ David Ray Papke, *Framing the Criminal: Crime, Cultural Work, and the Loss of Critical Perspective, 1830-1900* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1987), 2-4.

¹⁵ "The Gallows," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 21, 1869.

¹⁶ "The 'Tidal Wave' of Crime," *Rocky Mountain News*, July 28, 1875.

had changed. Robbery, which had always been the major cause of concern before the Civil War, became a much more troubling prospect after it. The same Colorado article bemoaned, “Now it is no longer with ‘your money or your life’ that a highwayman accosts you, but ‘your life and your money.’” In the second half of the nineteenth century, violent crime rates fell in every civilized Western nation but the United States. From 1860 to 1890, the population rose 170 percent, but violent crime increased 445 percent.¹⁷ People killed people for money, for love, for honor, for revenge, and sometimes, for seemingly no reason at all. Victims were less and less likely to know their assailants.¹⁸ Criminologists of the period struggled to understand why.

In 1940, criminologist Betty Rosenbaum published a pioneering article in the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*. Titled, “The Relationship between War and Crime in the United States,” her work built on Abbott’s earlier research on the crime wave of the late 1860s. Part psychology and part statistics, Rosenbaum’s work saw war as a cause of the great historical spikes in crime. She argued that emotional disconnect developed out of wartime violence. Army life was the hotbed of bad company. Volatile postwar conditions provided a stage for crime to play out. Though Abbott and Rosenbaum were two of the first to deliver evidence that war had a direct relationship to crime, they put forth a theory that had long been believed—something about war can change people. “When the war is over and man returns to the everyday civil competition of life,” Rosenbaum argued, “it is inevitable that war-ethics should have left their mark upon him. The necessary conditions can call them into action again.”¹⁹ Though it

¹⁷ Otto Bettmann, *The Good Old Days—They Were Terrible!* (New York: Random House, 1974), 87.

¹⁸ Randolph Roth, *American Homicide* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), 299.

¹⁹ Betty B. Rosenbaum, “The Relationship between War and Crime in the United States,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* (1931-1951) 30, no. 5 (January 1, 1940): 722.

is now questioned whether combat experience makes soldiers more likely to commit crimes in the following years, some scholars argue that war legitimizes violence. A prominent historian of violence, Ted Robert Gurr speculates, “If the civilizing process has been accompanied by sensitization to violence, then war, including internal war, temporarily *desensitizes* people to violence.”²⁰

Despite the inability of prison records to give statistics on veteran crime, both Abbott and Rosenbaum used prison records before and after the Civil War to find general trends in crime during the second half of the century. First, crime rates on the home front fell during the years of the conflict, at least in the North. Abbott examined the prison records of seven northern states and judged that convictions began to fall in 1861 and decreased steadily until 1865. It is likely that the army contributed to this drop by absorbing criminals who might otherwise have been arrested. In a report released in 1867, the Prison Association of New York explained the decline, arguing, “Criminals were as numerous, perhaps more numerous, than ever; but convictions were fewer. This was due to several causes. One of these causes was tersely expressed by a sheriff, who observed to one of us during the progress of the strife, that the penalty of crime now-a-days was to enlist in the army, and get a large bounty.”²¹

In the 1874 “Annual Report of the Committee on Prison Discipline,” a stint in the army was listed as a part of the history of a prominent New England murderer. The criminal “proceeded from the station-house to the reformatory prison; from the reformatory to the house

²⁰ Ted Robert Gurr, “Historical Trends in Violent Crime,” in *The History of Crime*. Vol. 1 of *Violence in America*, ed. Ted Robert Gurr, Violence, Cooperation, Peace: An International Series 1 (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1979), 47-48.

²¹ Enoch Cobb Wines, Theodore William Dwight, and Prison Association of New York, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada Made to the Legislature of New York, January, 1867* (Albany: Van Benthuysen and Sons, 1867), 312.

of correction; from the house of correction to the state prison; from the state prison to the army in time of civil war; from the army to the house of correction again.”²² The army was a refuge and a holding place for criminals. It was a place where lawbreakers could make themselves useful to their nation. Depending on the severity of their crimes, offenders could finish their sentence in the ranks or return to the penitentiary at the war’s completion. As Abbott concludes, it was logical that crimes among women, who could not serve in the armies as an alternative punishment, rose significantly during this period.²³

By 1866, seventy percent of the prisoners convicted were men who had served in the army or navy. Discharged men poured into the prisons, and the *North American Review* commented on the disturbing trend in its 1867 issue. The editors proposed that “nearly or quite half of the existing prison population [has come] from the ranks of soldiers and sailors . . . There cannot be less than five or six thousand soldiers and sailors who fought for the Union now confined in the state prisons of the Union; to say nothing of the tens of thousands besides, who during the year have been confined in the lesser prisons.”²⁴ The high population of veterans in prison added a note of urgency in the search for remedies to America’s postwar crime problem. Before the Civil War, people had many ideas about how crime could be prevented. Their actions during and after the conflict reflect efforts to control violence and crime.

²² F. B. Sanborn, “Report of the Standing Committee on Prison Discipline,” in *Transactions of the Third National Prison Reform Congress, Held at Saint Louis, Missouri, May 13-16, 1874: Being the Third Annual Report of the National Prison Association of the United States*, ed. Enoch Cobb Wines (New York: Office of the American Correctional Association, 1874), 62.

²³ Abbott, “The Civil War and the Crime Wave of 1865-70,” 219-222.

²⁴ “The Reformation of Prison Discipline,” *North American Review* 105, no. 2 (October 1867): 580-581.

When Daniel Needham addressed his religious brethren, his words revealed an awareness of technology's role in public perceptions of crime. The address also exhibited a truth about how people in the nineteenth century dealt with crime and its causes. Needham, like many other people, believed crime prevention was a religious problem:

It is well that the Christian Church should consider the great question of Crime, its causes, and the means by which it may be diminished. No question of more vital importance can engage its attention or employ its moral resources. It is a question which has to do with the well-being of every member of the human family. The growth of the church, the progress of civilization, the happiness of mankind, depend upon its solution.²⁵

Needham acknowledged that the group to which he spoke had no legislative or executive authority, but only the Church could provide spiritual guidance, the real antidote to America's crime problems. Crime and violence were outcomes of sin. Sins like intemperance, idleness, and extravagance produced crime and violence, so in order to eliminate these problems, individuals had to experience inner conversions and turn from their sinful ways.

No one who studies the historical sources from this era could be shocked by Needham's conclusions. After all, the nineteenth century was the century of reforms spearheaded by religious organizations. For many people, sin was another obstacle in the way of an increasingly progressive society. The next section will look at intemperance, the principal sin associated with violence and crime. Unfortunately for veterans, intemperance was also the principal sin associated with time spent in the army.

²⁵ Needham and Bowen, *The Cause and Prevention of Crime*, 3-4.

III. The Moral Sense Has Become Deranged: Alcohol, Drugs, and Violence

On April 16, 1862, Major-General John Adams Dix made a proclamation. Only a year after the first shots rang out at Fort Sumter, Union forces were experiencing an all too familiar military problem. Alcohol abuse dissolved order and discipline in the camp. Having recently witnessed the dismissal of two officers for drunkenness, Dix lamented that “not a court-martial is held without having such cases before it.” Drunkenness was an issue because it robbed soldiers of their senses on the battlefield when mental and physical fortitude were most necessary, but alcohol consumption had other ill effects as well. “Nine-tenths of all the crimes and offenses for which officers and soldiers are brought to trial are the fruits of this degrading and ungentlemanly vice,” and it was for this reason that Dix urged officers “to banish from their encampments and quarters all intoxicating liquors, which add no vigor either to their mental or physical powers, and which are a certain source of demoralization, and often of indelible disgrace.”¹

Much like violence and crime after the Civil War, alcohol was not a problem unique to the Union army. Violent outbursts by soldiers on both sides were often related to alcohol consumption. One Confederate nurse described the fate of an army doctor who, refusing to give two intoxicated hospital volunteers more whiskey rations, was stabbed to death. Her diary mourned his fate, declaring, “If they had not been under the influence of liquor I am certain they would not have committed the deed.”² As will be seen in this chapter, anecdotes of violence encouraged by drink abound in the published diaries of Union and Confederate soldiers.

¹ John Adams Dix, *General Orders No. 11*, Head-Quarters, Middle Department, Baltimore, MD, April 16, 1862, quoted in Edward Cornelius Delavan, *To the Army of the United States* (Albany: Charles Van Benthuysen, 1862), 4.

² Kate Cumming, *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse*, ed. Richard Barksdale Harwell (1866; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 107.

There has always been a relationship between crime and alcohol, and citizens of both the North and South knew this going into the war. During a day of fasting and prayer appointed by President Abraham Lincoln, one preacher noted, “The work of corruption, the ravages of intemperance, the increase of crime, move forward without molestation.”³ Works addressing one of the subjects almost always mentioned its connection to the other. When war broke out in 1861, pamphlets were already circulating that warned soldiers about the evils of drink. One such work targeting young Confederate soldiers declared, “Think how it prevails among the most degraded portions of the community. . . . Should not dark suspicion and decided reprobation be stamped upon that which is thus associated with the lowest debasement and crime? Such drink, in its very nature, has a perverting and debasing tendency.”⁴ Violent crime and drunkenness were frequently lumped together as barriers to the armies’ success, but they continued to plague soldiers after the war. Veterans, many of whom entered the ranks at a young and impressionable age, often developed a thirst for liquor from their time in camp.

In studying any group's relationship with alcohol, many factors are at play. Religious convictions, prescriptive measures, gender roles, possible repercussions, and societal perceptions must all be addressed when discussing social taboos. A study of drinking among soldiers delves into these issues, and conclusions cannot be drawn without addressing alcohol consumption before the war, the religious atmosphere of the later part of the nineteenth century, the distribution of prescriptive literature in camp, the disciplinary measures instituted by the army,

³ George Duffield, *A Thanksgiving Discourse: The Rule of Divine Providence Applicable to the Present Circumstances of Our Country, Delivered in the First Presbyterian Church of Detroit, Thursday, November 28, 1860* (Detroit: Free Press Mammoth Book and Job Printing House, 1861), 7.

⁴ South Carolina Tract Society, *Appeal to the Youth, and Especially to the Soldiers of the Confederate States* (Charleston: Evans and Cogswell, 1861), 4.

and the effects and perceptions of consumption at the war's close. The soldier's relationship with alcohol, the subject of countless primary sources, was an important topic during the war, and it remains an important topic related to the readjustment of veterans at the war's close.

Study of the veteran's relationship with alcohol begins with the nation's relationship with alcohol in the years leading to the war. In Eric Burns's *The Spirits of America; A Social History of Alcohol*, he describes drink as America's "first national pastime." He comments, "Booze was food, medicine, and companionship in the early days of America; ichor, elixir, and *aqua vitae*. It was how the tongue got loose and the mind receptive, how the body unlimbered and the future grew bright. It was a boost for one's courage, a shield against loneliness, a light in the midnight hours when the stars were hidden and the moon otherwise occupied."⁵ Colonists had brought alcohol with them on the voyage to America, and once there, their taste for liquor did not abate. The consumption of excessive amounts of hard liquor was an acceptable social activity and widely encouraged in the new nation.

However, by the nineteenth century, Americans had slowly begun to view alcohol differently, and the substance was transformed from positive good to social taboo. Historians debate the reason for that change. Some have argued that many colonists believed consumption would naturally decline after the Revolution. People associated excessive drinking with warfare, an assumption that would resurface during the Civil War. In *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War*, Alice Tyler examines this outlook. She believes that early Americans "confidently asserted that the excessive drinking was due to the long periods of war in the eighteenth century," but these same

⁵ Eric Burns, *The Spirits of America: A Social History of Alcohol* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 8.

people “were confounded by the fact that the consumption of intoxicants increased even more rapidly in the years of peace after the Revolution.”⁶ This suggests that while the war caused an increase in consumption, consumption did not revert to its former levels at its close. Veterans and civilians who drank to escape wartime suffering continued to drink as much if not more in the years afterwards.

In the early years of settlement and warring against Native Americans, and later on, British soldiers, consumption did not appear to be a pressing issue. Tyler goes on to argue that measures like the Excise Tax of 1791 made some move at lowering consumption, but it was shortly repealed. As time passed, the realization that America's consumption problem would not disappear on its own caused temperance advocates to mobilize. Historian James Morone argues that changes in the religious atmosphere lit the reforming spark and changed perception of alcohol. In his book, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History*, Morone suggests that religious Americans' new distaste for strong spirits at the turn of the century was caused by the growing fervor of the Second Great Awakening. He declares, “With preachers announcing that the millennium lay at hand, men and women began to swear off hard spirits; the yearning for perfection drew them until they were pledging total abstinence.”⁷

Some sects, such as the Methodists and the Quakers, had been waging a steady war with alcohol from America's beginnings, but historians Mark Lender and James Martin argue that the new era of both religious and social reform spurred on what otherwise would have been labeled radical action. They deem the nineteenth century “an era of intense social reform activity–

⁶ Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 312-313.

⁷ James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 284.

activity that merged temperance with goals as diverse as school reform, abolition, and women's rights. This ferment, growing out of the times, left the young republic in turmoil over a host of new social forces—forces that moved the nation steadily toward its modern character as a pluralist democracy.”⁸ The desire for temperance, therefore, was a direct result of the desire for overall reform.

Alcohol consumption was one of many practices falling under the scrutiny of an increasingly strict societal code, the same code that would crack down on crime in the later years. Both alcohol and crime would grow to be a central concern of reform-minded citizens, as most people believed the evils were intertwined. Lender and Martin explain the importance of the temperance crusade, asking how the nation could “logically promote better care for the mentally ill or the imprisoned if it allowed people to drink themselves to insanity or to a life of crime. . . . It seemed impossible to cure national ills without acknowledging the centrality of the liquor question.”⁹

As for the exact year the temperance movement began, there is no precise date, but many scholars credit Benjamin Rush with first effectively publicizing the temperance agenda. Some denominations had been pushing temperance all along, but Rush's witty medical literature did more to convince his audience that alcohol had the power to do more harm than good. More significantly for the topic at hand, Rush frequently attacked the use of alcohol in army hospitals during the Revolution, insisting that consumption did little to help the wounded or feverish

⁸ Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, *Drinking in America: A History* (New York: Free Press, 1982), 64.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

soldier.¹⁰

Rush would become something of a temperance prophet. By 1808, the first temperance society was founded in Saratoga, New York, and the movement spread from there. Temperance had always been a moral and religious issue, but the nineteenth century saw more and more people advocating temperance for practical reasons as well. Workers who drank less tended to accomplish more, and people began to question long-held beliefs about the positive effects of alcohol on attitude and work ethic. Historians Jack Mendelson and Nancy Mello describe this transition in *Alcohol Use and Abuse in America*, writing that the members of these new temperance organizations “were particularly taken by the belief that labor efficiency could be improved by renouncing the daily alcohol rations given on the job in the morning and afternoon, and it was decided to emphasize this point in a public education campaign initiated by means of pamphlets and broadsides.”¹¹ The idea that alcohol was not necessary to function daily was a revolutionary concept for many Americans, and the benefit of alcohol rations for soldiers and sailors would continue to be a subject of debate throughout the Civil War. Divisions over the usefulness of alcohol in the army led to frequent investigations by sanitary commissions and attempts at policing hospital stashes.

The relationship between the increasing desire for efficiency and temperance reform has been overlooked by some historians. Though temperance was a moral issue for many Americans, it was an economic issue for others. Jack Blocker writes about this aspect of the crusade in *Alcohol, Reform and Society: The Liquor Issue in Social Context*. He goes so far as to

¹⁰ Alyn Brodsky, *Benjamin Rush: Patriot and Physician* (New York: Truman Talley Books, 2004), 179.

¹¹ Jack H. Mendelson and Nancy K. Mello, *Alcohol, Use and Abuse in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), 20.

argue that temperance was “a product of changes in the character and conception of work and social relationships. Temperance reform was not a hopelessly reactionary and irrational movement. Rather, it was part of a widespread movement to discipline society and to create a society of predictable individuals devoted to self-improvement.”¹² An era of increasing efficiency and industrialization required a workforce of increasingly efficient laborers, and when the time came, soldiers.

That is not to say, however, that the voice of religion was not heard on the issue. The first wave of the temperance movement did much to influence American drinking culture by the time of the Civil War, but as Morone and others argue, so had the religious fervor associated with the Second Great Awakening. The revivals of the early part of the nineteenth century produced a religious tide of numbers and devotion, and in the midst of the spiritual upheaval, Americans became even more diligent in working for righteous causes. Drunkenness was one of many sins that people believed could be eradicated with organization and persistence, and many of the temperance societies that formed were religious in nature.

Lender and Martin cite the Presbyterian clergy as among the first to get behind Rush on radically publicizing the temperance crusade. The authors comment that Presbyterians, like the reformers advocating temperance for practical reasons, “feared the loss of national stability and of time-honored values and social relationships. . . .The [Presbyterian] association called not only for preaching against intemperance but also for excluding spirits from the family diet and from church gatherings.”¹³ In this way, churches that had long argued that temperance was a

¹² Jack S. Blocker, *Alcohol, Reform, and Society: The Liquor Issue in Social Context* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979), 46.

¹³ Lender and Martin, *Drinking in America*, 67.

religious issue began organizing into associations that produced literature and actively worked to convert church goers and the irreligious alike to the goal of moderation and later, total abstinence. The first national temperance association, founded in the 1820s and later known as the American Temperance Society, was, therefore, organized by powerful clergymen who argued that the nation's relationship with alcohol was a matter for their concern.

In *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, historian Timothy Smith looks at the role Protestantism played in the social reforms of the nineteenth century. Carrying the reforming impulse on their shoulders, clergymen found most social issues under their jurisdiction. As Smith explains, “Clergymen inspired the dominant social movement of the period, the crusade for humanitarian reform, at every stage. They were the principle arbiters of manners and morals and the most venerated citizens of every community.”¹⁴ It only made sense that churches would pioneer temperance, and the revivals of the nineteenth century granted preachers a stage from which they could advance their social causes. As Smith further argues, “By the time of the Civil War the conviction had become commonplace that society must be reconstructed through the power of a sanctifying gospel.”¹⁵

Lyman Beecher is one example of a notable preacher who advocated temperance values. More importantly, he weighed in on the effects of alcohol in the military. Like Rush, Beecher insisted that alcohol only impeded military efficiency and success. He gave solemn warning against its dangers in his sermons:

The effect of intemperance upon the military prowess of a nation, cannot but be great and evil . . . If, in the early wars of our country, the mortality of the camp had been as great as it has been since intemperance has facilitated the raising of recruits, New England would

¹⁴ Timothy Lawrence Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

have been depopulated, Philip had remained lord of his wilderness, or the French had driven our fathers into the sea, extending from Canada to Cape Horn the empire of despotism and superstition. An army whose energy in conflict depends on the excitement of ardent spirits, cannot possess the requisite coolness, nor sustain the shock of a powerful onset, like an army of determined temperate men.¹⁶

Beecher had touched on a central problem in the liquor question, a problem that would become increasingly important during the Civil War. Could armies fighting under banners of righteous and godly causes allow their soldiers to live riotous lives in camp? What message would be sent if visions of the glory and honor of battle clashed with the harsh realities of rampant debauchery? Though Beecher was an old man at the start of the Civil War, he had long considered temperance a necessary value for any noble army.

Soldiers trudged off to battle in 1861 carrying their alcohol history in their knapsacks, and that perception would only continue to evolve in the coming years. Each soldier's relationship with alcohol had been forming long before the war began. In the decades directly preceding the war, the only issues more on the minds of Americans than temperance were slavery and states' rights. Even so, the nation's relationship with alcohol would remain a subject of debate, and to many, it was a matter requiring religious intervention even into the very camps of both armies.

The extent to which alcohol abuse existed in the armies falls beyond the scope of this essay. Because this is an introduction to the topic of how soldiers and civilians viewed and treated alcohol, this essay does not look specifically at consumption statistics, though that is also a subject that requires further investigation.¹⁷ In order to look at perceptions of alcohol, it must

¹⁶ Lyman Beecher, *Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance* (New York: American Tract Society, 1827), 51-52.

¹⁷ Thomas Lowry has provided some of the most significant literature on Civil War consumption statistics. For further reading, consult his books: *Curmudgeons, Drunkards, and*

first be accepted that alcohol abuse did pervade military life. This is a belief backed by diaries, letters, and sermons which this chapter examines. The various actions religious groups and military leaders took to curtail drinking among soldiers similarly lends credit to the notion that liquor was a military as well as a social problem.

As much as the sermons and revivals of the nineteenth century pushed the temperance cause forward, the expansion of printed literature that accompanied them had an even more dramatic effect. Men who might have had no opinions about temperance and other conservative values before the war suddenly found themselves as soldiers with an opportunity to educate themselves. Two factors contributed to the significance of religious literature aimed at soldiers: time and access.

Enlisted men experienced a multitude of changes in the transition from civilian to army life, and not all of them were disheartening. One effect of the war was that fresh recruits had a new abundance of spare time, and while some men chose to use that time for riotous living, many others used the time to read. This is a topic historian David Kaser comments on in his *Books and Libraries in Camp and Battle: The Civil War Experience*. “The War,” he maintains, “created in abundance the one requisite commodity for extensive reading that had previously been in short supply to American men—leisure time. Wars are not all gore and glory. Since the beginning of organized warfare, soldiers have been burdened by huge blocks of time during

Outright Fools: Courts-Martial of Civil War Union Colonels (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) and *Irish and German Whiskey and Beer: Drinking Patterns in the Civil War* (n.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011). Unfortunately, Lowry's works deal almost exclusively with the Union armies, and an investigation into the drinking habits of the Confederate armies is desperately needed. Jack Bunch's *Roster of the Courts-Martial in the Confederate States Armies* (Shippensburg: White Mane Books, 2001) gathers some records but does not index the charges.

which they had nothing to do but wait.”¹⁸

Letters from soldiers consistently mentioned the wealth of extra time, even the boredom of their new lives. The letters of John Gundrum, a young Union soldier stationed at Camp Ruff in New Jersey, described camp life as largely monotonous. He complained, “We have not much to do, we have to drill only about four hours a day, and Guard Duty which comes once a week to a man for 48 hours, but not all that time at once.”¹⁹ Army life was largely characterized by bouts of inactivity interspersed with periods of fierce combat and excitement. Theodore Winthrop poetically described the camp experience: “It is monotonous, it is not monotonous, it is laborious, it is lazy, it is a bore, it is a lark, it is half war, half peace.”²⁰ Presented with ample time to devote to reading, soldiers only had to decide what to read, and there was a myriad of choices.

Churches and tract societies did not miss the opportunity to cater to the unoccupied soldier. Organizations like the American Tract Society and the Protestant Episcopal Tract Society recognized that the abundance of free time accompanying military life would need to be filled with something, and they eagerly stepped in to publish tracts and pamphlets that dictated honorable pursuits and condemned darker ones, such as brawling and drink. Meant for entertainment, edification, and instruction, temperance literature had come to a captive audience,

¹⁸ David Kaser, *Books and Libraries in Camp and Battle: The Civil War Experience* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), 13.

¹⁹ John Gundrum to Eve Gundrum, Camp Ruff, September 30, 1862, in “Civil War Letters: A Soldier's Letters from Camp Ruff,” ed. Richard Micchelli, *Journal of the New Jersey Postal History Society* 41, no. 2 (May 2013): 100.

²⁰ Theodore Winthrop, “Theodore Winthrop Recalls A Typical Day at Camp Cameron,” in *The Civil War Archive: The History of the Civil War in Documents*, ed. Henry Steele Commager, rev. ed. (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2000), 207.

and the camp was the perfect place for the promotion of worthy causes.

Over the course of the century, temperance advocates had made their cause the subject of plays, sermons, songs, poems, and tracts. One of the best examples of temperance literature was the genre of novels it created, the so-called “temperance tales.” These stories were meant to frighten readers through the fictional accounts of pitiful drunkards who either relinquished the bottle or suffered degraded lives of poverty, violence, and crime. Timothy Shay Arthur became a prolific author of such tales. Best known for *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*, published in 1854, his *Illustrated Temperance Tales*, published four years earlier, graphically depicted the wailing families of alcoholic fathers in dark shadow. The introduction promised the characters would convince the unconverted masses of the horrors of unchecked consumption, claiming, “Thousands have been reformed through their agency, and thousands more will be led out of the mire and clay of sensual indulgence by the force of their irresistible influence. They speak a language that all can understand; warning those who are just leaving the paths of safety, and drawing back those who have already fallen away.”²¹

Instruction manuals detailing wholesome pursuits also had their place in the army. Reverend Jared Waterbury was one author of such literature. Published by the American Tract Society, his manual for officers reinforced the gravity of their positions as examples to their troops. A section of his pamphlet titled, “Leisure Time—How to Be Occupied,” outlined specifically what men should do upon finding themselves with free time. He warned that the unoccupied officer was “strongly tempted to seek the coveted excitement in the social glass, or in the stimulus of the gaming-table. How many have fallen in this way! But the course we

²¹ Introduction to *Illustrated Temperance Tales* (Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley, 1850), 9-10.

recommend will give mental occupation, furnish incentives to duty, and do away a supposed necessity for those forced and artificial stimulants which are so detrimental to health and ruinous to character.”²² The occupation recommended by Waterbury and many others was reading, but not just any type of reading would do. Books discussing military strategy, history, and religion were the best. Such instruction manuals encouraged soldiers to spend their time on self-reflection and perfection, largely in an effort to fight off demoralizing pursuits like drink or carousing.

Prescriptive literature, however, was not enough to eradicate drinking or its effects among the ranks, and military officials employed a host of tactics to curtail unruly behavior. Historian Lorien Foote's *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army*, uses Thomas Lowry's extensive indexing work of army courts-martial records to estimate the influence of alcohol on Union ranks. She concludes, “Alcohol was involved in 18 percent of the incidents that came before general courts-martial; 3,133 men were charged with being drunk on duty in general courts-martial, and a conservative estimate is that thousands more were punished for this military crime at the regimental level. Observant officers believed that alcohol was at the root of most disciplinary issues in the army.”²³

Though the numbers are harder to produce given the lack of consistent military records, Lowry argues that conditions were likely similar in the Confederate army. In *Irish and German Whiskey and Beer: Drinking Patterns in the Civil War*, he comments, “In our own Confederate database, we have 5,949 cases, with 225 mentioning alcohol, an incidence of 3.8 percent. Does

²² Jared Bell Waterbury, *The Officer on Duty* (New York: American Tract Society, 1863), 78-79.

²³ Lorien Foote, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 30.

this mean that most Southerners didn't drink? In the land of moonshine, that seems unlikely. . . .In brief, we have no means of surveying how wide-spread alcohol-related offenses were in the armies of the Confederacy.”²⁴ Until further research is produced, historians widely accept that alcohol provided the catalyst for many of the disciplinary problems in both armies. How the armies dealt with drunken soldiers varied from regiment to regiment.

Part of the alcohol problem in the ranks came from the dual message on consumption presented by the military. Drunkenness was frowned upon, yet soldiers were often given opportunities to drink. Thirsty soldiers could beg or barter with doctors who issued alcohol for medicinal purposes. Alcohol rations were often issued to all soldiers both healthy and sick in the belief that it would strengthen their constitution and increase stamina. John King, a soldier with the 92nd Illinois, believed the rations did the opposite. In his diary, he wrote, “There was just enough [of each ration] to make the men boisterous, excitable, and foolish. After the drinks there was a sort of pandemonium in nearly every tent.” He then divulged the story of two men who, after receiving their morning rations of whiskey, brawled with each other until “one of the men thrust his thumb into the other man’s mouth and got it bitten nearly half off.” A few days after the incident, another issue of rations was followed by a stabbing in which a man died. King dreaded the alcohol rations and lamented the fact that there was “little notice taken of the affair.”²⁵

Special occasions and holidays also gave soldiers the chance to drink without punishment. Scott Martin addresses the practice in his article, “A Soldier Intoxicated Is Far

²⁴ Thomas P. Lowry, *Irish and German Whiskey and Beer: Drinking Patterns in the Civil War* (n.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 83.

²⁵ John M. King, *Three Years with the 92d Illinois: The Civil War Diary of John M. King*, ed. Claire E. Swedberg, 1st ed. (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1999), 38, 44.

Worse than No Soldier at All': Intoxication and the American Civil War.” As he proposes, “Officers sometimes provided their men with whiskey or other intoxicants to lubricate the celebration and improve morale. So long as officers regulated the celebrations, and dispensed relatively modest quantities, military authorities considered this distribution of liquor permissible, or merely turned a blind eye to it.”²⁶ Peer pressure led some soldiers to drink, and officers were just as likely to provide that pressure as fellow privates. King also told of his experience with a captain who forced alcohol on his young recruits, many of whom “had been well raised and had never drunk beer before.” On King’s first meeting with the captain, the officer treated his men to a drinking binge in a hotel bar. When some of the men refused the offerings of alcohol, the captain mocked them, saying, “Temperance is well enough for women in times of peace but soldiers cannot be bothered now with temperance pledges.” Temperance’s association with women led to the view of drinking as a man’s recreation. The more you drank and the better you could hold your whiskey, the more masculine you were. It was not long before all of the captain’s men had to be hauled home in wagons.²⁷

With this much drinking going on, alcohol undoubtedly affected the performance of soldiers. Men on guard duty often let their thirst for alcohol interrupt their duties. In a letter to his brother, James Miller wrote that he had been assigned the duty of guarding a nearby rebel family. He received the assignment because his predecessor left his post in the middle of the night, got drunk, fired his gun, and made up a lie that he had been fired upon.²⁸ Charles

²⁶ Scott C. Martin, “A Soldier Intoxicated is Far Worse than No Soldier at All': Intoxication and the American Civil War,” *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 25 (Fall 2011): 75.

²⁷ King, *Three Years with the 92d Illinois*, 2-4.

²⁸ James Todd Miller to Robert E. Miller, Summer Duck Run, Farquier County, VA, September 7, 1863, in *Bound to Be a Soldier: The Letters of Private James T. Miller, 111th*

Haydon's Civil War journal told the story of a man who "carelessly left his post and went to a house nearby to get a drink." However, the soldier paid dearly for his whiskey. When he returned to his duty "he was shot in the back by someone concealed about the house."²⁹

Drinking on guard duty could leave the camp open to enemy intrusion, but injuries in the camp due to drunkenness were even more common. Haydon mentioned a drunk man who "fired off a musket through the side of a tent and came near killing a man." Too much drink had always made men careless, but army life meant weapons in the hands of intoxicated men. After witnessing one drunk soldier draw a sword on another drunk soldier brandishing a dirk, Haydon lamented, "We are in as much danger from our own men as from the enemy. Not less than six or eight men have been accidentally shot since we left Detroit."³⁰

Alcohol was dangerous when it caused injuries in camp, but it could be even more detrimental if it caused men to be unfit for march. Union Colonel Charles Wainwright recounted the disturbing memory of a soldier who became too drunk to stand and had to be left on a roadside. Greg, a friend of the drunk soldier, hid a short distance away and waited for him to wake up so they could catch up to the march. When a squad of Confederate soldiers came upon the drunk man, "they tried to take him along but could not, so one of them shot him through the brain with his pistol while the others pulled off his boots and left the body. The whole thing was

Pennsylvania Infantry, 1861-1864, ed. Jedediah Mannis and Galen R. Wilson, *Voices of the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 112.

²⁹ Charles B. Haydon, *For Country, Cause and Leader: The Civil War Journal of Charles B. Haydon*, ed. Stephen W. Sears (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1993), 84.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

done in a minute and within sight of where Greg was sitting.”³¹

Drunkenness among soldiers also affected the outcome of battle. When he reflected on his war experiences in 1870, a reformer named Thomas Deering lamented, “Rum is the soldier's enemy and the nation's foe—financially, socially, and morally. It caused victory, in many instances, to its enemies, and slaughter to its friends, by rendering both officers and men unfit for the duties of the hour.”³² Memoirs and letters home frequently attributed battle losses to drinking among the officers and troops. Capt. Francis Adams Donaldson blamed the loss of Chancellorsville on the inebriation of Gen. Joseph Hooker and his commanding officers. Proud of their successful arrival and well-formed plans, Hooker and his men “commenced that infernal tipping which appears to be the orthodox thing among officers of high rank . . . It is with them drink, drink, drink, always and all the time. From this cause alone Hooker lost his head, and the battle of Chancellorsville can be placed among the other thousands of disasters wrought by rum.”³³

Even though it could jeopardize army successes, soldiers and officers often escaped punishment for consuming alcohol. Consumption was hard to control, and Steven Ramold's work, *Baring the Iron Hand: Discipline in the Union Army*, acknowledges the struggle for obedience. “At various locations and at various levels of authority,” he notes, “the army tried to

³¹ Charles Shiels Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles S. Wainwright, 1861-1865*, ed. by Allan Nevins (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), 488-489.

³² Thomas W. Deering, *Intemperance: Its Financial, Physical, Mental, Social and Moral Evils, and Its Causes and Remedies* (New York: Cowan, 1870), 21-22.

³³ Francis Adams Donaldson to Aunt, Potomac Creek Station, VA, May 9, 1863, in *Inside the Army of the Potomac: The Civil War Experience of Captain Francis Adams Donaldson*, ed. J. Gregory Acken (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1998), 227.

ban the presence of alcohol in an attempt to force soldiers to stop drinking. But even if soldiers were inclined to obey the bans . . . the irregularity of antialcohol regulations and the disparity in the level of enforcement ensured that the prohibitions were doomed to failure.”³⁴ In a letter to his brother, Donaldson bemoaned the availability of alcohol: “It is astonishing the extent to which drinking is carried on in camp, and were I so inclined there is no restriction or limit to the amount of whiskey I could drink.” Able to drink without much interference from authorities, Donaldson saw drinking as the army’s “favorite pastime.”³⁵

When officers did enforce punishments for drinking, it was usually long overdue. Drinking was generally punished at the regimental level only when a soldier was so drunk he posed a violent threat to those around him. Donaldson recounted an experience where a soldier got drunk and stole a musket which he then used to coerce a guard into allowing him access to the regiment’s stacks of arms. He held the weapons hostage and threatened Donaldson with the bayonet. The two broke into a fight which ended when the captain fractured the soldier’s skull with the butt of his gun. Rowdiness and brawling caused by drunkenness persisted until there was no choice but to confront it. When the problem was addressed too late, it forced officers and soldiers into violent confrontations like this one.³⁶ Haydon was similarly disgusted with the lack of regular reprimand in his regiment: “The men continue their drunkenness and gambling almost without reproof. If we had a captain worth a row of pins he would change some things.” As time passed, Haydon’s superiors were more interested in subduing dangerous drunks than

³⁴ Steven J. Ramold, *Baring the Iron Hand: Discipline in the Union Army* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 165.

³⁵ Donaldson to Brother, Potomac Creek Station, VA, December 26, 1862, in *Inside the Army of the Potomac*, 196.

³⁶ Donaldson, October 17, 1863, in *Inside the Army of the Potomac*, 366.

formally punishing them. By January of 1862, Haydon groaned, “We have done sending men to the guard house for drunkenness. We just tie their hands and feet, gag them and put them to bed till they get sober.”³⁷

Many people at the time believed more strict regulation on a higher level would reduce drinking in the army, but it was an uphill battle. A few temperance advocates went so far as to propose bills banning liquor of any kind. John Marsh, the longtime secretary of the American Temperance Union, lobbied for a temperance department in the Union army. He was sorely disappointed to find that few government officials were willing to take action. Marsh responded in disgust, “No apprehension of danger seemed to arise; and though general approbation was expressed of some temperance action, I found it must be from private, individual, and not governmental, or even Sanitary Commission action. Clean beds, good food, comfortable tents and efficient discipline, were all, in the opinion of many, that was needed to secure from intemperance.”³⁸

The fact that officers had the ability to purchase alcohol legally also allowed drunkenness among all the troops to persist. Crusaders in the North and South called for military reforms, one writer asking, “Why should wine or ardent spirits be allowed to officers in the army, when they are denied to common soldiers?” A Northerner observed, “It is not only unjust, but dangerous to the moral welfare of young officers, and to the physical and mental capacity of all. . . .Why this discrimination—this tolerance of an evil practice in officers, which soldiers are vigilantly guarded

³⁷ Haydon, *For Country, Cause and Leader*, 66, 178.

³⁸ John Marsh, *Temperance Recollections: Labors, Defeats, Triumphs* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1866), 334.

against and punished for?”³⁹ Though the idea that consumption by soldiers of any rank was being “vigilantly guarded” is questionable, people were understandably confused by the dual position of the Union army on temperance. Looking southward, a bill in South Carolina proposed outlawing the sale of liquor anywhere in the state while the war continued, but bills such as these were either ignored or ineffective if undertaken.⁴⁰

Consumption was still on the rise throughout the nineteenth century, and the rowdy living and dependence experienced during the war only increased it. This was certainly the fear of the American Temperance Union, which pleaded with soldiers not to bring their unholy habits home. One of its tracts, titled “Mustered Out—Now Look Out,” warned, “Will it comport with the honor and dignity of a conquering hero returning to his home, or having returned to his home, to give himself up entirely to his cups—to sit about the tavern and the grog-shop, and drink and drink and drink to intoxication—to make himself the pest of society?”⁴¹ Deering firmly believed that the bitterness of the war had caused the rise in drinking. “If there were fewer drunkards to-day than there was fifty years ago,” Deering proposed, “I would consider it miraculous, for the causes have been and now are at work to encourage it.”⁴²

Boredom, pleasure, and peer pressure had all contributed to high levels of consumption in

³⁹ *Minor Reforms Needed: It Has Been Often Said by Men Who Spoke Knowingly, that the Greatest Evil in Our Army is the Use of Intoxicating Liquor by the Officers: Drunkenness of Important Officers Has, on Several Occasions, Caused Us Important Losses* (1862).

⁴⁰ Committee on Roads, Bridges and Ferries, *A Bill to Prohibit the Sale of Spirituous Liquors in Small Quantities during the War*, South Carolina, General Assembly, House of Representatives, December 15, 1862 (Columbia, 1862).

⁴¹ George W. Bungay, *Mustered Out—Now Look Out* (New York: American Temperance Union, 1865), 2.

⁴² Deering, *Intemperance*, 13.

the army, but fear was as likely to drive soldiers to the bottle as any other cause. Soldiers turned to alcohol to calm their nerves when battle proved too disturbing to handle. Donaldson described one horrific incident where some soldiers in his regiment were stranded on the front lines. Unable to retreat due to the enemy's sniper fire, they lay face down, flat on the ground all night and into the next day. The stillness and the waiting was maddening. When a fellow captain by the name of Crocker could no longer stand the anticipation, he jumped up, grabbed the regiment's flag, and gained some ground before he was fired upon. Donaldson was dismayed to see that, "as he came back to his place, a bullet struck and passed through his canteen, letting out the whiskey in a great stream. Lt. Kelly, who was quite near Crocker and who was equal to the emergency, rose up on his knees, seized and placed the canteen to his lips and finished it before Crocker knew what was the matter."⁴³ During battle, alcohol was used to get through intensely stressful situations.

The drinking problems among soldiers remained unresolved at the close of the war, and as they faced difficult adjustments to civilian life, they continued to turn to alcohol for comfort. Consequently, the temperance reform that had started in the early days of the century found renewed energy. Eric Burns, taking a slightly different perspective, suggests that it was how people drank that changed more than how much they drank. Drinking had always been a social activity that brought people together, but alcohol served a different purpose for soldiers trying to escape the horrors they witnessed. He argues that soldiers drank hard liquor, alcohol that could "cross their eyes, roil their gullets, send them spinning into nightmares less real, and therefore more manageable, than the ones in which they lived every day of their wartime lives. This was

⁴³ Donaldson, December 14, 1862, in *Inside the Army of the Potomac*, 189-190.

not social drinking. There was no society anymore. The booze was to obliterate.”⁴⁴

And alcohol was not the only vice veterans turned to in hopes of fleeing their problems. Drugs meant to help soldiers escape pain on the battlefield were often hard to relinquish when the fighting had stopped. The Civil War witnessed an evolution in the field of medicine. Chloroform, which had been the old method of sedation for surgery and pain, was replaced with depressants such as opium and its derivatives, morphine, heroin, and laudanum. Surgeons praised the fast-acting power of these drugs which could produce the same effects in a fraction of the time. The *Manual of Military Surgery* issued to field surgeons in the Confederacy marveled at these drugs. “A new and extensive field for doing good is open to the humane military surgeon,” it proposed, “and he who is the fortunate possessor of this talisman, will receive daily the thanks and blessings of his suffering patients. . . . There are very few injuries requiring operation which do not demand the free use of opium.”⁴⁵ Another treatise on army surgery in discussing the treatment of abdominal wounds proclaimed, “There are two fundamental rules of treatment never to be forgotten, and which are required in every instance.” The first was this: “Give opium freely and frequently.”⁴⁶ When there was opium at the surgeon’s disposal, this phrase could have described the method of treatment for all of the soldier’s ailments.

It was not until after the war that people became began to perceive the growing dependence of many soldiers on analgesics. Just as the war had provided many men with their

⁴⁴ Burns, *The Spirits of America*, 95.

⁴⁵ Julian John Chisolm, *A Manual of Military Surgery, for the Use of Surgeons in the Confederate States Army; With an Appendix of the Rules and Regulations of the Medical Department of the Confederate States Army*, 2nd ed. rev. ed. (Richmond: West and Johnston, 1862), 226.

⁴⁶ Felix Formento, *Notes and Observations on Army Surgery*, The American Civil War Surgery Series 9 (1863; repr., San Francisco: Norman Publishing, 1990), 35.

first taste of strong drink, it also provided them with their first exposure to opium. The drug soothed physical pain, but it could also provide emotional escape. In 1871, a Philadelphia doctor by the name of Alonzo Calkins described the tendency to turn to opium in hopes of “obliterating the sense of the present and actual, or of creating a forced and exaggerated ideal of existence.”⁴⁷

Though they do not credit the war as the sole factor in the meteoric rise in opium addiction at the end of the nineteenth century, Dean Latimer and Jeff Goldberg’s history of opium admits that many soldiers and physicians attributed their dependency to the war.⁴⁸ One postwar tome written especially to remedy opium addiction, linked the war to an increase in the habit. “The events of the last few years have unquestionably added greatly to their number,” it announced. “Maimed and shattered survivors from a hundred battle-fields, diseased and disabled soldiers released from hostile prisons . . . have found, many of them, temporary relief from their sufferings in opium.”⁴⁹

There was more to opium addiction than escape and lethargy, however. The agitation, anxiety, and insomnia that withdrawals produced undoubtedly strained the nerves of some already unstable veterans. Opium addiction bred a sense of apathy among others. This may have furthered the impression among the public that soldiers came home listless, reckless, and sometimes dangerous. Calkins warned that through opium consumption, “The moral sense has become deranged and diseased even out of proportion to the physical deterioration; all the worst

⁴⁷ Alonzo Calkins, *Opium and the Opium-Appetite: With Notices of Alcoholic Beverages, Cannabis Indica, Tobacco and Coca, and Tea and Coffee, in Their Hygienic Aspects and Pathologic Relationships* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1871), 76.

⁴⁸ Dean Latimer and Jeff Goldberg, *Flowers in the Blood: The Story of Opium* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1981), 192.

⁴⁹ *The Opium Habit: With Suggestions as to the Remedy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1868), 7.

propensities of the man, sedulously concealed so long as the mind continued normal, now work up to the surface, exposed in all the grossness of their deformity, and thenceforward ‘shadows, clouds and darkness’ brood over and around.”⁵⁰

Drugs also proved a common method of suicide for soldiers and veterans. In one interesting medical case, a woman who had disguised herself as a man to serve in the army attempted to kill herself after the war by swallowing sixty grams of opium. “In about two hours afterwards,” the report affirmed, “being disappointed in the effects of the drug, she swallowed half an ounce of laudanum, and about half an hour later, took as much more.”⁵¹ Calkins noted that laudanum was “the favorite agent for effecting suicide.” Out of a study involving two hundred cases of attempted suicide and accidental death, he estimated that “laudanum was the form in 138 of them; and of 60 suicides pure, 46, or 4 out of every 5, were accomplished by the same means.”⁵²

The greatest deterrent to opiate consumption would have been the expense. A general order issued to Confederates in the Trans-Mississippi in 1862 listed the tariff for morphine at fifteen dollars an ounce. Opium was much cheaper with only a two dollar tax, but both were still costly addictions.⁵³ Nevertheless, opiates were accessible to soldiers and civilians who could afford them, and even in a tumultuous economy, opium sales increased after the Civil War. In

⁵⁰ Calkins, *Opium and the Opium-Appetite*, 76.

⁵¹ Theodore George Wormley, *Micro-Chemistry of Poisons, Including Their Physiological, Pathological, and Legal Relations: Adapted to the Use of the Medical Jurist, Physician, and General Chemist* (New York: William Wood, 1869), 462.

⁵² Calkins, *Opium and the Opium-Appetite*, 46.

⁵³ Robert C. Newton, *General Orders No. 4*, Head Quarters, Trans-Mississippi District, Little Rock, AR, June 2, 1862 (Little Rock: Confederate States of America, 1862).

Drugs that Enslave: The Opium, Morphine, Chloral and Hashisch Habits, physician Harry Kane lamented the growing consumption of opiates. Comparing opium consumption in 1881 with that of twenty-five years earlier, he wrote, “While the population has increased 59 percent, the sale of opium has increased 900 percent, and morphia 1100, or an average of 206 grains of opium and 24 grains of morphia to every inhabitant.”⁵⁴ By 1889, the rising use of opiates recreationally was causing physicians to search for alternative methods of treatment that would prevent these lifelong consequences.⁵⁵

Contemporary sources suggest that veterans contributed heavily to the perception of alcohol and drugs after the war. People believed that both alcohol and drugs had the power to transform veterans into apathetic drains on society. The evolution of how the public thought about these substances, first as social and physical goods and later as dangerous to the morals of society, coincided with a change in the public perception of veterans. When the boys came back, they brought their habits with them, and some of these habits had to be controlled for the safety of the community. This chapter opened with General Dix’s lament that courts-martial were not impeding the unruly behavior of soldiers under the influence of alcohol. When religious fervor, prescriptive literature, and physicians’ warnings were not enough to stop dangerous habits during the war, these issues had to be dealt with in the old soldiers’ homes, asylums, and prisons after the conflict.

⁵⁴ Harry Hubbell Kane, *Drugs That Enslave: The Opium, Morphine, Chloral and Hashisch Habits* (Philadelphia: Presley Blakiston, 1881), 6.

⁵⁵ J. F. A. Adams, “Substitutes for Opium in Chronic Diseases,” *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 121, no. 15 (1889): 351.

IV. A Curse to Every Deserving Soldier: Controlling the Violent Veteran

In October of 1884, a Union veteran named George Hare was turned out of the soldiers' home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Having been in and out of soldiers' homes for three years, Hare was no stranger to the establishments. He claimed that the reason for his eviction was a letter published a month before in the Dubuque *Daily Democrat* in which he condemned the treatment of veterans in the home. In the letter, he railed against corrupt management, the abuse inflicted on the residents by the officers in charge of them, and the lack of proper food and medical treatment. Interestingly, his words suggested that the neglect of the homes could have been a result of the negative perception of the soldiers confined to them. "It is true we have some bad men here; but only a few," Hare claimed, "and it is not right to condemn the whole of us on their account. This has been done ever since the homes were started, and when you look at it in its true light, these homes have not been a success, but a curse to every deserving soldier." Hare felt abandoned by the country he had worked to preserve. He complained of a coldness in the home and a feeling that life there was every man for himself. "If this is a 'home' our dictionary is wrong," he declared.¹

Though Hare was no criminal, this remains a fitting quote to begin a discussion of how crimes by veterans were controlled after the Civil War. Hare's words showcase both sides of the delicate relationship between the general public and veterans who were hoping to reenter civil society. As instances of veteran violence and substance abuse captured public attention, some civilians came to fear and mistrust veterans. This affected how some people viewed former soldiers. At the same time, veterans believed their years of service merited a certain kind of

¹ George M. Hare, *Mysteries and Miseries of the Soldiers' Home* (Woonsocket: Patriot Printing House, 1885), 12.

treatment upon their return. Problems in readjusting to civilian life should be met with understanding and mercy.

As the Union veteran Thomas Parker ended his memoir of the 51st Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment, he lamented the death of many fine soldiers, but he pleaded with the nation to focus on the fair treatment of the surviving veterans. “Some say, ‘they can't be trusted in responsible situations.’ Out with the idea,” Parker fumed. “The nation's life was reposed in his hands, did he betray the trust? . . . Look at his armless sleeve, his legless pants, and see how *too* faithful he cherished his trust, and yet he is not to be trusted! Why, forsooth? Because some displayed their vicious traits?”² The fact that some veterans lashed out at those around them and wound up abandoned in rest homes, asylums, and prisons is testimony to the failure of the relationship between veterans and the general public, and ultimately, to the failure of efforts to control violence and crime during and after the Civil War.

During the war, military discipline was a pendulum that swung between oversights that eroded respect for command and punishments that were too harsh. When Union veteran Henry Blake published the memoir of his army service, he remembered, “The constant interference by generals of high rank, and intermeddling officials in Washington, have often seriously impaired the efficiency of the troops, by perverting the impartial administration of justice.” Blake was appalled by the corruption rampant among officers who frequently overlooked the crimes that were committed. Most crimes were carried out by one private against another. Even though it was their duty to maintain order in the ranks, there was little incentive for officers to get

² Thomas H. Parker, *History of the 51st Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers and Veteran Volunteers, from its Organization at Camp Curtin, Harrisburg, PA, in 1861, to its Being Mustered Out of the United States Service at Alexandria, VA, July 27th, 1865* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1869), 700.

involved. Officers also protected some men from charges. As Blake complained, they “may deliberately suppress them without any regard to the just interests of the service, if the culprit is one of his friends, or can repay him for his sinful kindness.”³

Historian Steven Ramold mentions the erosion of taboos during the war, an erosion precipitated by a lack of consistent discipline and punishment in the army. Criminal acts were committed that often received little response, “acts that, in their civilian antebellum lives, would have stained a man’s reputation, created public outcry, and led to lengthy prison terms, or even the death penalty.” Indifference to crime and violence bred more crime and violence, and a lack of consistent justice sent a message to soldiers that they could often get away with impulsive and harmful behavior. This had been more than lawlessness in the army. It represented a breakdown of order among the drafted male population. When these crimes went unpunished, Ramold argues, “traditional modes of behavior changed, and actions that would have shocked and stunned them in civilian life became acceptable or even expected.”⁴ Doubtless, this shift had a tremendous effect on soldiers when they reentered civilian life.

At the other end of the pendulum, punishments in the army could be too brutal. The best example of this could be seen in the guard houses that held prisoners awaiting courts-martial. For soldiers whose first crimes had been committed while in the army, the guard house was their first taste of prison life. Guard houses were often dark, dank, crowded spaces packed with soldiers who had committed all kinds of crimes. Though the amount of space allotted to each prisoner was supposed to be regulated, overcrowding was a frequent problem. A law passed in

³ Henry Nichols Blake, *Three Years in the Army of the Potomac* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1865), 316-317.

⁴ Steven J. Ramold, *Baring the Iron Hand: Discipline in the Union Army* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 264.

1779 decreed that prisoners needed a minimum of 630 cubic feet of space per man, but a report issued shortly after the Civil War found that prisoners in army guard houses received much less space. “The guard-houses,” stated the report, “and, especially, the prison-rooms and cells of our posts, are, in many cases, unfit for their purpose, and form one of the most frequent subjects of remonstrance on the part of medical officers.”⁵ Guard house cells became a health risk as soldiers were jammed together with little room to breathe.

When the famous Copperhead Henry Clay Dean was detained in a guard house at Keokuk, Iowa, he commented on the close quarters and lack of sanitation. “Some of [the imprisoned soldiers,] even in sickness, lawless and ungovernable,” he proposed, “had been sent in from the hospital, breathing the deadly malaria of all the diseases generated by the vices of the army.” He described a place where the floors were filthy with tobacco spit and excrement. Dean was further appalled by the fact that rapists, thieves, murderers, deserters, and even captured enemy soldiers were all held in the same area, brawling and harassing each other. Having spent fourteen days in the guard house, he fumed, “The central idea of a military prison was to make it as nearly the very essence of hell as was possible. In this they made a capital success.”⁶

When a soldier acted out while on the march or in the field, other punishments had to replace confinement. Standing on barrels, additional guard duty, hard labor, and the delegation of tasks intended to humiliate were all methods of reining in behavior. When punishments were harsh or seemed undeserved, it strained the relationship between officers and soldiers. In Frank

⁵ John Shaw Billings, *A Report on the Barracks and Hospitals of the United States Army: With Descriptions of Military Posts* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1870), XVIII.

⁶ Henry Clay Dean, *Crimes of the Civil War, and Curse of the Funding System* (Baltimore: J. Wesley Smith and Brother, 1869), 18.

Wilkeson's reflections on life in the army, he wrote that by the winter of 1863, "There was no longer the friendly feeling of cordial comradeship between the enlisted men and their officers. . . . The punishments inflicted on the enlisted men were various, and some of them were horribly brutal and needlessly severe."⁷

Another former soldier, Henry Morford spent the majority of his memoir criticizing the tendency of officers to break the spirits of their troops through cruel punishments. In *Red-tape and Pigeon-hole Generals*, he argued, "Punishment is necessary—but how many to whom it is entrusted forget that in giving it a moral effect upon society, care should be taken that it may operate beneficially upon the individual." He lambasted the officer "who crushes the soul out of his command by exacting infamous punishments for trivial offences."⁸

So why did punishments vary so significantly? For every source that speaks of the lack of discipline in the army, there is another that details brutal and humiliating chastisement. This highlights one of the main flaws in the military justice system: there was a tendency for punishments to be decided in the moment by a handful of officers on the regimental or company level. In August Kautz's *Customs of Service for Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers*, which outlined the process for the discipline of soldiers, he admitted that the method of punishment was "almost entirely dependent on the discrimination of each individual officer." While the Articles of War detailed how courts-martial should be run, officers chose which offences would receive formal reprimands under law. If an officer believed an offense was not serious enough to merit a court-martial or a field-officers' court, or even if he thought a trial

⁷ Frank Wilkeson, "Punishments in the Army of the Potomac," in *The Civil War Archive*, 344.

⁸ Henry Morford, *Red-Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals: As Seen from the Ranks During a Campaign in the Army of the Potomac* (New York: Carleton, 1864), 176-177.

would be inconvenient, the punishment was his to choose and enforce. Officers had the power to impose “summary punishments” on their men, including “tying them up by the hands, compelling them to carry a loaded knapsack, and similar inflictions.” Kautz conceded that these punishments, “although not authorized by law, are sanctioned by custom; and custom is the common law of the army.”⁹

Over the course of his army service, Capt. Charles Haydon became convinced that punishments were best left out of the court. It was important, he said, “for a captain to enforce discipline with his own hand.” Haydon also believed that soldiers preferred instantaneous physical punishments to courts-martial, which had the power to exact fines or stop pay. Most importantly, when an officer punished a soldier himself, news of the insubordination was kept quiet. “The example is good and it saves time and the reputation of the company,” Haydon remarked. “It is certain and expeditious and will not require to be often repeated.”¹⁰ Even so, many soldiers resented discipline, no matter who ordered it.

Part of the reason soldiers responded so bitterly to punishment was the fact that shaming the offender was often the purpose of both impulsive correction and formal sentencing. For men who were not accustomed to military discipline, this must have been a powerful blow to their pride and sense of masculinity. Alonzo Hill vividly recalled hearing the sentencing of some

⁹ August V. Kautz, *Customs of Service for Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers, as Derived from Law and Regulations, and Practised in the Army of the United States: Being a Handbook for the Rank and File of the Army, Showing What Are the Rights and Duties, How to Obtain the Former and Perform the Latter, and Thereby Enabling Them to Seek Promotion and Distinction in the Service of Their Country* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1864), 200-201.

¹⁰ Charles B. Haydon, *For Country, Cause and Leader: The Civil War Journal of Charles B. Haydon*, ed. Stephen W. Sears (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1993), 309.

offenders in his regiment, many of whom were on trial for drunkenness and brawling.¹¹ The process of trying multiple cases at once was convenient, but it also ensured the presence of a captive audience. A trial was anything but a private affair, and the whole regiment was often present to witness the punishments carried out. *A Treatise on Military Law and the Practice of Courts-Martial* reinforced the idea that the punishment was only as effective as the attention it received. “With regard to the mode of carrying the sentence into execution,” the treatise advised, “it may be observed, that as one great end of punishment is the prevention of crime by example, it should be rendered, in this respect, as extensively useful as possible, by the publicity which attends its execution.”¹²

Alonzo could not forget the image of a comrade being formally dismissed. The man had picked fights with his fellow soldiers and vowed to murder an officer, and his punishment reflected the severity of his threats. In a dress ceremony, the drum and fife played the “Rogue’s March” as guards led the condemned soldier down the ranks. The procession must have made an impression, for Alonzo recounted:

’Twas a sad scene. I’ll never forget how the poor fellow looked; it was painful to witness such unutterable dejection and shamefacedness. I felt relieved when he had passed quite out of camp, and I heartily hoped that I might never again be called upon to witness a similar sight. How then must he have felt while marching along that avenue of men—that gauntlet of a thousand pairs of eyes. I think I should much rather run a gauntlet of knives and tomahawks in the hands of the most relentless savages.¹³

The desire to make an example of offenders caused some officers to pass fast judgments

¹¹ Alonzo F. Hill, *Our Boys: Personal Experiences of a Soldier in the Army of the Potomac* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1866), 38-39.

¹² Stephen Vincent Benét, *A Treatise on Military Law and the Practice of Courts-Martial*, 5th ed. (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1866), 198.

¹³ Hill, *Our Boys*, 38-39.

with deadly consequences. In their memoir, Robert Kimberly and Ephraim Holloway told the story of a soldier who received the ultimate punishment after he had too much to drink and struck a corporal. Either a lack of interest or a genuine oversight led to the man being court-martialed for violence against a superior officer. Even though corporals were not commissioned and therefore not technically superior officers, the brawler was sentenced to execution.

Kimberly and Holloway claimed the whole incident took place because “the division general thought this was a fit time to give a lesson in army discipline.” The division had to watch the firing squad carry out its work, but the incident “was remembered with horror, not with a heightened sense of duty and respect for authority.”¹⁴ Though scenes like these wounded the pride of soldiers and led them to fear and mistrust their leaders, officers and courts were largely unable to curtail bad conduct. Soldiers continued to disobey orders, act rowdy, and commit crimes, earning the army its dubious reputation.

After the war, masses of unemployed soldiers, many of whom were incapacitated physically or mentally, poured back into the towns they had left half a decade earlier. America struggled to control substance abuse and violence among veterans while simultaneously caring for the disabled. In March 1865, as he faced an uncertain nation in his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln ended his speech with a vow to “finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.”¹⁵ In a time when both the North and South were already shaken, arrangements had to

¹⁴ Robert L. Kimberly and Ephraim S. Holloway, *The Forty-First Ohio Veteran Volunteer Infantry in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (Cleveland: W.R. Smellie, 1897), 19.

¹⁵ Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865” in *The Speeches of Abraham Lincoln: Including Inaugurals and Proclamations*, ed. G. Mercer Adam (New York: A. L. Burt, 1906), 411. Institutions had always been in place to help American veterans transition into civilian life. The first law providing pensions for disabled veterans was ordained in 1636 to

be made to accommodate this new population of veterans.

A year before Lincoln's memorable words, a professor of medicine by the name of John Ordronaux submitted his *Report to the U.S. Sanitary Commission on a System for the Economical Relief of Disabled Soldiers*. Meant to revise some of the current pension laws, the report hoped to offer humane solutions to the problem of veteran readjustment. As its title suggests, the report focused on the fiscal problems resulting from the soldiers' return, but it also laid the groundwork for how the nation would deal with veterans who could not reenter the work force. Its first proposition called for the creation of rest homes for disabled soldiers. Still, the report maintained, "It is for the interest of all that those institutions should be as few in number as possible. Their doors should be opened only to the absolutely dependent, confirmed and incurable invalids. All others, who can do better, should be encouraged to attempt a higher and more useful sphere."¹⁶

Concerning this first proposition, two problems were immediately evident. Knowing the cost that these institutions would incur, the government would need as few men dependent on the homes as possible. There was also a gray area involved in deciding which veterans were "confirmed and incurable invalids." The report specifically mentioned the physically disabled, those soldiers who had lost an eye or a limb in the service which kept them from pursuing their

give relief to those wounded while protecting Plymouth colony from hostile natives. Though they failed to fulfill their promises, the Continental Congress assured soldiers they would receive pensions after the Revolution. Pensions and land grants were also contracted after the War of 1812. For more information, consult the Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA History in Brief* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 1-2. Though these laws existed, and were often implemented, the Civil War necessitated veteran aid on a larger scale.

¹⁶ John Ordronaux, *Report to the U.S. Sanitary Commission: On a System for the Economical Relief of Disabled Soldiers, and on Certain Proposed Amendments to Our Present Pension Laws* (New York: Sanford, Harroun, 1864), 16.

old trades. It even mentioned those men whose health had deteriorated due to exposure to the elements or contraction of diseases. It was the job of the government to provide places for veterans likely to die from their ailments: “For four or five years after the war, hospitals for this class will still be necessary, and the charities of the humane and Christianly-minded will be taxed to provide additional alleviation to their declining days.”¹⁷

Ordronaux’s report described the creation of soldiers’ homes, such as the one George Hare inhabited. Soldiers’ homes existed in the United States half a century before the Civil War, the first one having been organized for navy veterans in 1811, but their number grew exponentially in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the North, both federal and state homes existed, but the goals of both were the same. Their purpose was to help veterans transition to civilian life. By placing officers in charge of the patients, dressing residents in uniforms, and holding them to certain military standards, such as roll calls, the homes were meant to simulate army life while still allowing veterans the ability to apply for leave and visit their families. The soldiers’ home was an army away from the army, a place for ex-soldiers to continue the lives they had lived for the last few years.

The South created similar homes for its veterans. Historian R. B. Rosenberg has compiled extensive research on the sixteen Confederate soldiers’ homes that were founded in the 1880s and 1890s, when monuments to the South and her suffering veterans were continuously constructed. Though they never garnered funding from the federal government, the United Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy drummed up sympathy and money for the cause. This was the primary difference between northern and southern homes. As

¹⁷ Ibid., 9.

Rosenburg explains, the “state home for disabled and poor Union veterans was part military camp, part workhouse, part asylum, and part final refuge, just as it was for ex-Confederates.¹⁸

In some ways, soldiers’ homes mirrored army life a little too closely. The homes cultivated the same bad habits that ran rampant in camp. Though initially intended as hospitals for the physically disabled, the homes became dumping grounds for aggressive, intemperate men who continued their dependencies despite the homes’ efforts to curb them. In *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America*, historian James Marten lists multiple examples of the disorderly conduct of drunken veterans in the homes. “Alcohol-related lapses were clearly a major disciplinary problem,” he argues. He also cites statistics from the Milwaukee soldiers’ home revealing that in 1881, 800 of the 1,840 transgressions committed by residents involved alcohol.¹⁹

Historian Rusty Williams has compiled records from the Kentucky Confederate Home that glimpse the daily lives of veterans living there. Inmates were expected to follow a set of rules read to them on their arrival at the home. Most of the rules were basic: veterans were expected to keep themselves and their rooms clean. They had to respect their fellow residents. Though they could apply for leave, they were required to answer at roll call every morning and evening unless their absence was permitted. Veterans had to observe a nightly curfew. Rules about alcohol were the strictest, and soldiers could neither become intoxicated nor have alcohol in their possession at the home. Though Williams works with records from a Confederate home, the rules would have been similar for Union homes. Fayette Hewitt, the man in charge of

¹⁸ R.B. Rosenberg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers’ Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 5.

¹⁹ James Alan Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 106-107.

drafting the rules for the Kentucky home, simply edited a copy of the “Rules and Regulations of Residents and Employees at Fitch’s Home for Soldiers,” a rulebook belonging to a veterans’ home in Connecticut.²⁰

When violence or drunkenness occurred inside the soldiers’ home, it could be punished in a number of ways. Some homes forced veterans to hand over their pension money to the commanders of the homes for the running of the facilities. Inmates then received an allowance that was “liable to forfeiture if the member receiving said allowance should be adjudged guilty of any misconduct or infraction of the rules of the home.”²¹ When it was later ruled unlawful for home authorities to have so much control over veterans’ pensions, fines replaced the old system. As in the case of George Hare, expulsion was another form of punishment. Trials similar to courts-martial decided the most severe punishments. As much as possible, authorities in the homes tried to handle disciplinary problems without the involvement of the police. One soldiers’ home had a hoodlum wagon built to rival that of the local law enforcement. “It is the intention of the governor,” reported a local newspaper, “that when an old soldier gets drunk in the city to have the officials here telephone to him, when the wagon will be sent in after them. After being taken to the home they will be punished under the home rules.”²²

Despite the rules and punishments, Williams notes the persisting disciplinary problems in the homes, some brought on by alcohol consumption. Among the violent episodes that occurred with “sheer and terrifying unpredictability,” he tells the story of a soldier named John McCreary,

²⁰ Rusty Williams, *My Old Confederate Home: A Respectable Place for Civil War Veterans* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 101.

²¹ “Soldiers’ Home,” *Daily Journal*, July 1, 1899.

²² “Will Have a Hoodlum Wagon,” *Kansas City Journal*, December 24, 1897.

who, believing there were rumors in the home that he had stolen a pouch of tobacco, snuck into the room of the soldier who owned the tobacco and attacked him with an axe while he slept. McCreary landed two blows to the soldier's head and another to his arm before he was dragged away by other inmates. He escaped from the home before he could be punished.²³

Violence also occurred among Union veterans. In 1896, the *Atchison Daily Globe* reported that Henry Schoern, a veteran on leave from the home in Leavenworth, Kansas, tried to destroy a nearby store. Schoern placed a stick of dynamite in the store's stove before escaping. Though no one was injured, he succeeded in blowing the windows out of the building and scaring the customers half to death. All this took place because Schoern believed that the owner of the store "thought less of him than he did of the other veterans of the home." He was jailed for the offence.²⁴ John Caplinger, an inmate of the Quincy Veterans Home, caused a violent scene while on leave with his family. Caplinger wanted to leave the soldiers' home permanently and live with his wife and children. When his wife would not agree to his return, he shot her in their front yard. She was saved when the ball struck the steel in her corset. Caplinger then shot himself in front of their two children.²⁵

Offenses like these suggest that, though the homes could care for the physical ailments of veterans, they struggled to address their mental afflictions, which were problematic both inside and outside the system. Still, soldiers' homes were preferred over local asylums, which dealt primarily with the mentally ill. When five soldiers were found in the Rock County Asylum in

²³ Williams, *My Old Confederate Home*, 150.

²⁴ "Dynamite in a Stove," *Atchison Globe*, October 15, 1896.

²⁵ "Result of Family Troubles," *Spanish Fork Press*, September 13, 1895.

Wisconsin, they were quickly transferred to the veterans' home.²⁶ It was the prevailing belief that soldiers should stick together, and that soldiers' homes would provide a family of battle buddies for the lonely. Soldiers' homes were also free of much of the stigma that asylums retained. Fred Compton, writing to the *National Tribune*, protested his confinement in the insane asylum at Willard, New York. He hoped to return to his former soldiers' home and saw his incarceration at Willard as "an act of injustice, since his malady was not one that affected his reason."²⁷ Though Compton and the veterans at Rock County were released to the care of veterans' homes, ex-soldiers who proved too difficult for the homes' staff to handle or who had a history of violence, could still find themselves in the care of local asylums. In Macon, Georgia, an old Confederate soldier was sent to the state insane asylum for plotting to kill an admiral and then himself. "It was ascertained that his mind had been wrong for two years," said the local newspaper.²⁸

Until the 1700s, madness was a private affair, and the mentally disturbed and chronically ill were the responsibility of their families and local authorities. People hid the mentally ill from society, consigning them to their fate. Though asylums slowly began to replace this model, they remained more prisons than hospitals. The primary purpose of the asylum was to lock the mentally ill away for the benefit and safety of the public. Restraint, not treatment or analysis, was the primary method of dealing with the disturbed.

Unfortunately, asylums were places where veterans could easily slip through the cracks. Newspaper stories often uncovered the poor treatment of veterans. In Kansas, the *Kinsley*

²⁶ "Veteran Soldiers in Poor Houses," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 14, 1899.

²⁷ "Some Weeks Ago," *National Tribune*, January 4, 1883.

²⁸ "Wanted to Kill Some Big Man," *Highland Recorder*, May 4, 1900.

Graphic exposed the “cruel and barbarous treatment” that led to the death of a veteran at the Osawatomie asylum. The man’s family members appealed to the governor for an investigation into treatment at the asylum, but the matter was glossed over with a trial that called no witnesses to the incidents there. The paper accused the asylum’s manager of using his political ties to request “a liberal coat of whitewash, and it was applied ad-nauseam, without even the semblance of propriety or decency.” By printing the article, the writer hoped to “ameliorate the condition of, and secure better treatment for about 100 old soldiers now in the insane asylums of the state.”²⁹ In Washington, the body of an unknown man was found in the Potomac River. He was later identified as an old veteran who had been held at St. Elizabeth’s Insane Asylum and drowned when he “wandered away from his attendant” and fell in the river.³⁰

Though the idea of dying alone and being labeled insane was terrifying, being subject to the penal system was a far worse and more common danger to veterans. Research by the prominent social worker Edith Abbot and criminologist Betty Rosenbaum have already shown that many Civil War veterans found themselves in prisons after committing crimes upon their return home. The nation was alarmed by the stories of violent crime, which the newspapers, sermons, and tracts portrayed as increasing daily. A London organization known as the Howard Association for the Promotion of the Best Methods of the Treatment and Prevention of Crime and Pauperism surveyed the justice system of the United States in 1891. “American criminality is so alarmingly increasing,” the association reported, “that whereas in 1850, every million inhabitants of the United States only contributed 290 prisoners, the proportion had risen to 853 in

²⁹ “Whitewash Galore!” *Kinsley Graphic*, September 6, 1895.

³⁰ “The Body of an Unknown Man Was Found,” *National Tribune*, October 6, 1892.

1870, and as high as 1,169 in the million in 1880.”³¹ The fact that many of the perpetrators of crime were veterans, men who both the North and South had so recently rallied behind, heightened public concern. Rosenbaum argued that dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system stemmed from sympathy for the soldiers who suffered its flaws.³²

Much of the blame for the perceived rise in violent crime fell on the prisons, institutions many believed were not successful in attempts to discourage further violent episodes or reform existing criminals. Justice was often administered on the county level in small, poorly funded jails. Historian Michael Hindus has examined the penal system in both Massachusetts and South Carolina during the nineteenth century, and he notes that the latter state was faced with the task of creating a state prison in the midst of this chaotic period. Still, county jails formed the foundation of the penal system. “Although prisons represent the pinnacle of the corrections hierarchy,” he explains, “the majority of suspects and convicts were confined to local jails and houses of correction. . . . Jails were used for debtors, witnesses, suspects awaiting trial, and vagrants, drunks, or vagabonds committed by local peace justices.”³³ Conditions in these local correctional facilities were as deplorable as they were in army guard houses, and escapes were as frequent as the lice that bred among the prisoners. Criminologists and sociologists of the period were also adamant that these jails were totally ineffective in deterring crime and violence.

³¹ Howard Association for the Promotion of the Best Methods of the Treatment and Prevention of Crime and Pauperism, *The Collegiate and Hotel Prisons of the United States, 1891* (London: Wertheimer, Lea, 1891), 1.

³² Rosenbaum, Betty B. “The Relationship between War and Crime in the United States.” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology (1931-1951)* 30, no. 5 (January 1, 1940): 726.

³³ Michael Stephen Hindus, *Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 202-203.

Offenders had to bide time in local institutions until prisons could make room for them, a custom lamented in an article in the *American Journal of Sociology*, for “our county jails are at present the most prolific breeders of crime in the land.”³⁴

Prison discipline was one of the most commonly scrutinized aspects of the criminal justice system. When Edward Livingston, the prominent author of penal statutes, wrote the Louisiana System of Penal Law in 1827, he saw the abuse that unregulated discipline could produce. Believing the rules of prison correction must be carefully outlined and firmly enforced, he warned, “Any discretion left to the jailer as to the mode of inflicting it, makes him, and not the judge, the arbiter of the culprit’s fate. . . . If this be permitted, or especially if inculcated as the duty of the keeper, imprisonment is the worst of all punishments, because the most unequal.”³⁵

Despite Livingston’s words, discipline in the prisons continued to be inconsistent and largely dependent upon the whims of a few men in charge, just as it had been in the army. In fact, there was a growing discomfort over the similarities between the ways punishments were carried out in the two institutions. At the third National Prison Reform Congress in Saint Louis, Missouri, the Committee on Prison Discipline complained that the Civil War had greatly affected the way prisons were run by giving “a great, and by no means wholly, beneficial prominence to the military spirit and type of character.” The committee argued that prisons were run like armies, not schools or missionary organizations, which would be more beneficial to the inmates.

³⁴ Frank W. Blackmar, “The Smoky Pilgrims,” *American Journal of Sociology* 2, no. 4 (January 1897): 499.

³⁵ Edward Livingston, *Introductory Report to the Code of Prison Discipline: Explanatory of the Principles on Which the Code Is Founded, Being Part of the System of Penal Law, Prepared for the State of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Carey, 1827), 45.

The report quoted a former soldier's words on the matter:

The objects of military and prison discipline are directly opposed, and they cannot, therefore, be advantageously pursued by the same means. . . . A necessary object in the one is to subdue individual character, and reduce all to parts of a compact machine; while that of the other should be specially to strengthen individual character, and, instilling right principles into it, encourage and enable it to act on those independently. Of minor incidents in our existing jail practice, accordingly, none appears to me much more pernicious than the endeavor to ape military demeanor in it."³⁶

One of the reasons military discipline was readily adopted by prisons after the Civil War had to do with appointing former officers to management positions in prisons, a practice the committee denounced in its report. Just as officers had been the questionable supervisors of soldiers' homes, they proved ill-equipped prison wardens. Both institutions continued to disappoint their dependents, and many officers entered management positions in the homes and prisons, continuing to enforce discipline as they had in the military. A prison warden should not have a "soldier's foibles," insisted one institutional report, or "he will fret at the restraints of law; overestimate his own wisdom, and the virtue of force and arms; rely too much upon drill, pipe-clay and the pistol; and will cherish an open or ill-disguised contempt for plodding method, humane effort, school instruction and religious devotion."³⁷

An article in the *North American Review* published a similar opinion about prison discipline. The penal system needed reform because "prison officers, seeing only the criminal, constantly antagonize him, conserve not the man until manliness from disuse dies out, while the criminal by the activity of opposition thrives and becomes strong." Discipline, when used, should be "closely scrutinized" to ensure that it was fair and uniform. Education should also be provided in the prisons to prepare convicts to become productive and independent members of

³⁶ F. B. Sanborn, "Report of the Standing Committee on Prison Discipline," 64-65.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

society upon their release.³⁸

In the first half of the nineteenth century, crime was a vague and persistent problem that people did not understand. In urban areas where violence and crime seemed the highest, the assailant was a faceless attacker of social order. As criminal historian David Johnson states in his work on the reformation of the police system, criminals “comprised a highly visible part of an urban underworld whose existence was unquestioned but whose composition and extent were unknown.” Johnson notes, “Aside from the fact that a diverse assortment of unruly juveniles, thieves, and other undesirable persons harassed them, urban residents knew little about these people; nor did they make any serious effort to investigate this subculture.”³⁹ It was easy to write these people off, to throw them in prison and never look back, but after the Civil War, the atmosphere changed. Even though veterans continued to be abused and abandoned by the nation’s methods of controlling misconduct, veterans like George Hare and their supporters pointed out the flaws of the system.

This chapter began with an excerpt from the letter that led to Hare’s removal from the Milwaukee soldiers’ home. Hare’s words were poignant but not unique. Newspapers had published similar letters from him and other soldiers. Many residents complained about soldiers’ homes. The homes attempted to serve too many purposes. They housed all types of men for all types of reasons. They were holding places for the physically disabled, mentally scarred, and potential threats to society. Ultimately, soldiers’ homes were places of confinement for all the

³⁸ Z. R. Brockway, “Needed Reforms in Prison Management,” *North American Review* 137, no. 320 (July 1883): 44-46.

³⁹ David R. Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld: The Impact of Crime on the Development of the American Police, 1800-1887* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 4.

marginalized veterans with no place in society and no options. Asylums and prisons were similar last resorts for veterans who exhibited violent tendencies.

Despite the tales of veterans whose actions landed them in these unfit institutions, little connection was made between mental instability, violence, and combat experience. Though examples have shown that veterans could sometimes lash out suddenly against their fellow comrades and families, a poor understanding of mental illness and combat stress led to the general public's inability to deal with veteran violence. This next chapter will address misconceptions about the homecoming of the soldiers, the mental effects of battlefield experiences on veterans, and the possible influence of the war on violence and suicide in the following decades.

V. Scenes through Which I Passed: Civil War Combat and Peacetime Violence

On April 10, 1869, Francis Shepherd was brought into a courtroom of the Baresville County courthouse. Shepherd, a Union veteran, had served his native state of Ohio in the war. While on leave in May of 1864, Shepherd killed a man named John Vetter, and it was because of this crime that Shepherd was on trial. Though he had originally entered a not guilty plea in the early days of the proceedings, Shepherd decided to plead guilty to manslaughter the day before his sentencing. When asked if he had any last comments, Shepherd had his lawyer read a statement:

If your Honor will indulge me I will say but few words. At the time this murder is said to have been committed, I was at home on a veteran furlough. In extenuation, if it be any, I will say, I served my country faithfully during the entire war. I might recount many scenes through which I passed from West Virginia to the fall of Richmond. If in my condition, when at home on this veteran furlough, I committed the crime with which I stand charged—but of which I have faint, if any recollection—I can only throw myself upon the mercy of the Court. I was but 17 years old when I volunteered in defense of my country. Is it not a mitigating circumstance that I was thus early thrown in the way of temptation? Will not your honor have mercy upon me? I have pleaded guilty. I can do no more. Have pity on me.¹

Despite Shepherd's testimony, the court maintained "there were no mitigating circumstances." They held Shepherd responsible for his crime, and "the extreme penalty of the law must be inflicted." They were unmoved by Shepherd's plea, and he was sentenced to ten years of hard labor.

The newspaper that covered the trial made no assumptions as to why Shepherd killed Vetter. It is possible Shepherd did not even know who Vetter was before he ended his life. The circumstances surrounding the crime are unspecified, but Shepherd's words offer insight into a

¹ "Proceedings in the Case of Francis Shepherd Charged with the Murder of John Vetter," *Spirit of Democracy*, November 16, 1869.

soldier's experience with violence on and off the battlefield. Though Shepherd killed Vetter before he was discharged from the army and was therefore not a veteran when he committed the crime, the aggression manifested at the close of the war, at home, in the one place where a soldier should not have to be a soldier. What is more, Shepherd used his last opportunity to address the court to place his crime within the context of his wartime experiences. He made the crime a product of the "scenes through which I passed from West Virginia to the fall of Richmond."

As Shepherd did in his closing remarks, men frequently mentioned the battlefield horrors they witnessed in their letters home. After the battle of Chickahominy in 1862, a northern soldier wrote to his family about his experience. "I have often read descriptions of great battles, but did not realize or comprehend them until I saw the reality," he remarked. He mentioned how the men died and the "horrible look on their countenances, as if they had seen something that had scared them to death." After detailing a scene in which he witnessed a father trying to stop the blood gushing from his own son's wound, the soldier added simply, "Men get hardened seeing so much misery."²

Despite the fact that personal letters addressed these taxing experiences, people on the home front did not dwell on them. Literature instead focused on bolstering the war effort and looked forward to the peaceful and blissful homecoming of the soldiers. Songs written during the war frequently focused on a soldier's discharge as a joyous occasion. A Boston music publisher released "O 'Twill Be A Happy Time, When the Boys Come Home" in 1864, as the

² A. Davenport, "Battle of Hanover Court-House," Chickahominy River Camp, June 1, 1862, in *Soldiers' Letters, from Camp, Battlefield and Prison*, ed. Lydia Minturn Post (New York: Bunce and Huntington, 1865), 90.

conflict drew to a close. The song proclaimed how “our hearts will leap for joy when we hear they’ve come—come from the field of war. Haste, haste, ye blissful moments!”³ Similar songs were produced in the South. “When the Boys Come Home,” a song from Augusta, Georgia, heralded the day when all would “live in peace and happiness.”⁴

Occasionally, a soldier’s words foreshadowed what coming home could really be like. Written in 1861 after the battle of Lebanon, Missouri, a poem by a Union soldier described the experience of lying wounded in the hospital, listening to the screams of his suffering comrades:

All do not die. Some struggle home again,
With lopped-off limbs, a piteous sight to see,
And linger out a weary life of pain,
Eating the bitter bread of charity.⁵

Even so, poems and songs about the suffering of soldiers almost never discussed emotional damage from war. They spoke of the loss of honor they felt when returning home with lost limb or the tragedy of death, but mental wounds went unmentioned.

Despite a general silence on the matter, mental instability was evident among an astonishing number of soldiers during the war years. In 1864, three physicians published an article in the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* titled, “On Malingering, Especially in Regard to Simulation of Diseases of the Nervous System.” The article explored the many ways soldiers feigned illness, but the authors concluded that contrived insanity was not one of them.

³ T. O. Conant, “O ’Twill Be a Happy Time, When the Boys Come Home” (Boston: G. D. Russell, 1864), 4.

⁴ Charles Carroll Sawyer, “When the Boys Come Home!” (Augusta: Blackmar and Brother, n.d.), 3.

⁵ “In the Hospital: After the Battle of Lebanon, MO, October 13th, 1861,” in *Poetical Pen-Pictures of the War: Selected from Our Union Poets*, ed. Hayward, J. Henry, 2nd ed. (New York: Henry J. Hayward, 1864), 147.

There was little incentive for soldiers to use mental illness to escape military service. Insane soldiers could not be discharged but had to face incarceration in the Government Insane Asylum. The stigma of being labeled a monomaniac would haunt them for the rest of their lives. Even so, the men noted that “the number of cases of insanity in our army is astonishing.” The assistant surgeon at the government asylum claimed that “the average admissions there from the army alone were rather over one every day.”⁶

Still, the public was able to ignore the phenomenon. Though there were pamphlets and sermons that warned soldiers against the bad morals they may develop in the army, battle was often seen as an anvil on which great men were molded. The experience would help boys mature. One poem written by a Union soldier after the capture of Camp Talbot, Missouri, in 1861 depicted the positive transformation that could take place. Titled, “Waiting for News,” the poem described a mother worrying about her soldiering son when the boy was becoming a man on the battlefield:

Dashing along ‘mid the carnage around him,
Fearless as Mars ’mid the balls that surround him,
Changed as by magic, from home’s tender brother,
Lovingest son both to father and mother—
Changed to a man, to a stern, noble soldier—
None in the field that is braver or bolder!

The poem further emphasized the admiration that would come with an honorable death in the war effort, reassuring the mother that those who suffered for the cause “are not victims of weakness, but glory!”⁷

⁶ William W. Keen, S. Weir Mitchell, and George R. Morehouse, “On Malingering, Especially in Regard to Simulation of Diseases of the Nervous System,” *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 48 (1864): 377.

⁷ J. C. Davis, “Waiting for News: Capture of Camp Talbot, MO, September 16th, 1861,” in *Poetical Pen-Pictures of the War*, 128-129.

Funerals for dead soldiers glossed over the terrifying experience of death on the battlefield. They emphasized the worthiness of a dead soldier's cause and the importance of dying a noble death. At the funeral of Noah Ferry, a Major of the Fifth Michigan Cavalry who was killed at Gettysburg, the pastor read a letter written by a fellow soldier. "He died as a soldier should die," the comrade wrote, "doing his whole duty fearlessly. All testify to his good soldierly qualities and uniform attention to his duties—fearing nothing, faltering never." The pastor depicted the death as a positive and destined outcome of Ferry's service. It was a sacrifice Ferry would have wanted to make, and he died how he would have wanted to die. "He fell," the pastor explained, "as he wished to fall, instantly, and without undergoing the pain of a lingering death upon the battlefield." Ferry would have been grateful that he was not "wounded and left to drag round through life a mutilated body."⁸

In the introduction to Major Ferry's funeral program, a quote was provided. "Pity not me," the words entreated, "I die as a man of honor should die, in the discharge of my duty." The quote was attributed to the chevalier de Bayard, a sixteenth-century French soldier. Bayard was a knight, and stories heralded him as a man without fear and reproach. He was the hero of multiple wars, he commanded his troops fairly, and he never plundered his enemies. Bayard was an example of courage and calm under fire, an example employed by Ferry's program to show what a soldier should be.⁹

⁸ David Mack Cooper, *Obituary Discourse on Occasion of the Death of Noah Henry Ferry: Major of the Fifth Michigan Cavalry, Killed at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863* (New York: John F. Trow, 1863), 23-24. For what historians have called the "Good Death," see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008) and Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

Historian Gerald Linderman has explored how soldiers and civilians used examples of patriotism and bravery to shape how they viewed war. In *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*, Linderman argues that men fixated on chivalric ideals to help them face the frontlines. “Manliness, godliness, duty, honor, and knightliness,” he explains, “constituted in varying degrees the values that Union and Confederate volunteers were determined to express through their actions on the battlefield.” Death and pain were not the worst outcomes of battle, it was shame. They should be proud to fight the good fight. Linderman notes that soldiers cited “‘duty’ as having prompted them to enlist and ‘honor’ as having held them to soldiering through their terms of enlistment, but the pursuit of courage—and its obverse, the flight from cowardice—proved the ultimate sanction.”¹⁰ Historian Earl J. Hess has suggested that romanticizing war also helped soldiers reframe the brutality and uncertainty of it. Some soldiers “gilded the harshness of combat in an effort to support the cause or simply as a way to soften the psychological impact of battle.”¹¹

Despite people’s efforts to look to Bayard and romanticize combat, the Civil War brought a type of warfare with which they had little experience. It was the first modern war, a fact psychologist Edward Tick believes affected the soldier’s perception of battle. In ancient wars, destruction was restricted to the technologies available. “It was fought hand to hand,” Tick notes, “as one warrior or one army against another. The effective range of the weapons—arrows, swords, spears—did not exceed the battlefield; the amount of destruction was limited by the strength of the individuals fighting.” Combat in the Civil War was nothing like the idealized

¹⁰ Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 16.

¹¹ Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 129.

version of war that the media upheld. Warfare was becoming increasingly chaotic and impersonal, and Tick argues that this kind of fighting resulted in “massive trauma,” not just physically but emotionally as well.¹²

Even with these constant encouragements about the nobility of battle and its positive effects on the character of those who fought, many soldiers were not changed for the better during the war. Soldiers’ memoirs brought the realities of battle to the general public. Charles Francis, a volunteer Union soldier wrote his brief memoir in hopes of “showing the facts as they were, stripped of the inevitable romance with which such narratives have been clothed by writers who have shown a lack of power to resist the temptation.”¹³ Alonzo Hill introduced his memoir by stating “I am fully qualified, by sad experience, to portray the ‘life of a soldier’ in every feature.” He recounted many gory scenes in which men lost their limbs and their lives before his eyes. He watched as one man picked his own arm up off the ground and ran screaming to find a doctor to reattach it. Another man “would suddenly spring into the air, uttering a piercing shriek, then fall back, quivering—lifeless—his eyes staring vacantly—his teeth set—his hands clenched till the finger-nails cut into the palms.” Images such as these froze in his mind, and he claimed “only the mad excitement of battle prevents one from growing deathly sick at such horrid sights.”¹⁴ Alonzo would eventually lose his own leg at Antietam.

Frank Holsinger, a Captain of the Nineteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, described the fear

¹² Edward Tick, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation’s Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005), 22-23.

¹³ Charles Lewis Francis, *Narrative of a Private Soldier in the Volunteer Army of the United States, During a Portion of the Period Covered by the Great War of the Rebellion of 1861* (Brooklyn: William Jenkins, 1879), 4.

¹⁴ Alonzo F. Hill, *Our Boys: Personal Experiences of a Soldier in the Army of the Potomac* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1866), VIII, 299, 306.

and anxiety that accompanied battle. In a paper he titled, “How Does One Feel Under Fire?” he marveled at the oddity of war. Combat was not all excitement and attack. There were phases of fearful waiting that strained the nerves. “I know of no horror so terrible as the period just preceding the shock of battle,” Holsinger remembered. The worst moments were those spent frozen on the field after having been wounded, unable to move for hours for fear of fire. “Every bullet as it strikes near you is a new terror. . . . How slowly time flies! Of, the agony to the poor wounded man, who alone can ever know its horrors!”¹⁵

Frank Wilkeson, a soldier in the Army of the Potomac, gave a more realistic picture of the horror of battlefield death in his memoir than Ferry’s funeral painted. Death was something every soldier had to witness, even if they did not die in battle themselves. “I have seen dead soldiers’ faces which were wreathed in smiles, and heard their comrades say that they had died happy,” Wilkeson remembered. “I do not believe that the face of a dead soldier, lying on a battlefield, ever truthfully indicates the mental or physical anguish, or peacefulness of mind, which he suffered or enjoyed before his death.” He described the “dreadfully distorted visages” and argued that a comment used to make death appear more peaceful “goes for nothing.”¹⁶

Soldier’s diaries detailed the terror of modern warfare. J. N. Hall, a Union soldier of the 113th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, described the experience of being peppered with ammunition during the battle of Chickamauga. “Grape, canister, shot, shell, and other death-dealing projectiles made of our ranks a harvest of death,” Hall lamented, “and in five minutes nearly one-

¹⁵ Frank Holsinger, “How Does One Feel Under Fire?” in *War Talks in Kansas: A Series of Papers Read Before the Kansas Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States* (Kansas City: Press of F. Hudson, 1906), 294, 304.

¹⁶ Frank Wilkeson, *Recollections of a Private Soldier in the Army of the Potomac* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1887), 200.

fourth of our regiment was either killed or wounded. Utter destruction awaited us. We wavered, gave way, and fled down the hill in disorder.” Canon fire made the battlefield a chaotic place where death lurked in every valley.¹⁷

The experience was similar for Confederate soldiers. Lieutenant R. M. Collins of the 15th Texas Regiment described coming upon dogs “riddled with bullets” and all types of carnage on the battlefield. A cannon ball had struck one soldier “so as to lift his entire head off, and as he fell his brains fell between his feet.”¹⁸ Collins vividly explained the fear of having to keep moving forward, seeing a cannon ball pass “about two yards in front of us and tearing a hole in the side of the hill large enough to bury an ox.” He talked about how shot burst over their heads, saying, he and his men “could feel the wind from it.”¹⁹ Battle was terrible, and the memoirs revealed it.

Soldiers experienced strange reactions to combat and developed methods of coping with fear and the horrors they saw. In 1869, Dr. T. W. Fisher published an article in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, titled, “Insensibility to Pain from Mental Causes.” “War furnishes,” he argued, “the best examples of endurance and disregard of suffering.” He recounted strange episodes of mania among soldiers. “A soldier, under unexpected fire for the first time, suddenly clubbed his musket and struck out furiously among his comrades, yelling all the while as if in the midst of the enemy. On being led out of the fight, the delirium subsided,

¹⁷ Francis Marion McAdams, *Every-Day Soldier Life, or a History of the One Hundred and Thirteenth Ohio Volunteer Infantry* (Columbus: Charles M. Cott, 1884), 269.

¹⁸ R. M. Collins, *Chapters from the Unwritten History of the War Between the States: Or, The Incidents in the Life of a Confederate Soldier in Camp, on the March, in the Great Battles, and in Prison* (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing, 1893), 163.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

leaving a condition of stupor which lasted several hours.” Fear before battle could suddenly give way to feelings of invincibility. Some soldiers scarcely noticed pain in the heat of battle, “careless of danger and indifferent to ordinary wounds.”²⁰

Historian James McPherson has also analyzed how soldiers dealt with fear of battle. The feelings of invincibility Fisher described can now be explained as a chemical change taking place in the body of the soldier. Extreme stress produced a surge of adrenalin and norepinephrine that sometimes caused soldiers to feel no pain. McPherson explains that if soldiers can “overcome the impulse to flight, when they go into action the flood of adrenalin turns many soldiers into preternatural killing machines oblivious to danger or fear.”²¹ He cites multiple examples of soldiers who described feeling overcome with rage or thirsting for violence in the heat of battle. Soldiers used blind fury to fight through their anxieties and the desire to flee from the battlefield. Violence could be a method of dealing with stressful situations.

In 1944, Willard Waller published a book he titled *The Veteran Comes Back*. The book was a warning about veterans who, upon their return from World War II, might become a threat to society. Though Waller’s work was written in the twentieth century, he cited multiple historical examples of veterans who returned from war with bitterness and a new attitude toward society and what it owed them. “Veterans, so justly entitled to move us to pity and to shame, can also put us in fear. . . . The hand that does know how to earn its owner’s bread knows how to take your bread, knows very well how to kill you, if need be, in the process. That eye that has

²⁰ T. W. Fisher, “Insensibility to Pain from Mental Causes,” *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 80, no. 23 (1869): 418.

²¹ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 39-43.

looked at death will not quell at the sight of the policeman.”²²

Waller specifically noted the increase in crime after the Civil War and argued that war produced in many soldiers “an inclination toward explosions of aggressive behavior.”²³ In a chapter on combat fatigue, Waller analyzed war’s tendency to traumatize soldiers and alter their personalities. “The soldier has been numbed by his experience, the frontline soldier more than others, but every soldier to some extent,” Waller declared. “He has his apathies and his intensities which seem equally incongruous to the civilian. . . .He explodes and blows his top at unexpected moments, but often fails to react at all when he is expected to do so.”²⁴

Waller’s words are interesting because they show a change in the language used to describe the veteran’s experience. While many during and immediately after the Civil War would have made the connection that military service could produce a change in the temperament or mental stability of men, few expressed the change in these terms. Other primary sources already noted in this study talked about bad habits that could develop in the army, such as drinking and a loss of morals. They talked about the rowdiness of camp life and even bemoaned the crime wave they believed took place when the war was over. Though soldiers described the horror of their experiences in their letters and diaries, they rarely reflected on how the scenes would affect their lives when the war was over. While some people connected the increase in crime with the war, people did not mention the relationship between the soldier’s horrifying battle experiences and his change in behavior upon return.

Even though people rarely linked aggression and mental instability to wartime trauma, a

²² Willard Waller, *The Veteran Comes Back* (New York: Dryden Press, 1944), 13.

²³ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

connection was there. The Government Insane Asylum admitted more and more soldiers throughout the course of the war, but the situation was even worse after it. In 2006, psychologists Judith Pizarro, Roxane Silver, and JoAnn Prause examined the pervasiveness of psychological problems among Civil War veterans. Using the military and medical records of 17,700 soldiers, they found that many experienced symptoms that fit within current classification of post-traumatic stress disorder. These symptoms included “paranoia, psychosis, hallucinations, illusions, insomnia, confusion, hysteria, memory problems, delusions, and violent behavior.” A higher percentage of his company killed in combat increased a soldier’s chances of developing mental and physical illness later in life. This was because these soldiers were more likely to experience “various traumatic stressors, such as witnessing death or dismemberment, handling dead bodies, traumatic loss of comrades, realizing one’s own imminent death, killing others, and being helpless to prevent others’ deaths.” Furthermore, the research argued that soldiers did not need to spend time in a prisoner of war camp or be wounded personally to share in this high risk for mental and physical problems after the war. Soldiers who witnessed combat were also more prone to pick up addictions that further affected mental stability, such as alcohol and drugs.²⁵

It is likely that psychological problems led some veterans to violence and crime after they returned from the war. Even decades later, veteran violence spontaneously occurred. David Silkenat, a historian of suicide and violence among Civil War veterans, argues that these later acts marked a “delayed onset” of mental illness.²⁶ In the 1880s and 1890s, when a proliferation

²⁵ Judith Pizarro, Roxane Cohen Silver, and JoAnn Prause “Physical and Mental Health Costs of Traumatic War Experiences among Civil War Veterans,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 63, no. 2 (February 2006): 195, 198-199.

²⁶ David Silkenat, *Moments of Despair: Suicide, Divorce, and Debt in Civil War Era North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 54.

of soldier memoirs were published, incidents of violent crime committed by veterans flooded the newspapers. William O'Connor, a 56-year-old veteran in the Grand Army of the Republic murdered his mistress. Her mutilated, legless body was found when O'Connor led the police to her burial spot. "O'Connor appeared not to realize the enormity of his crime."²⁷ Walter Brown shot his mistress in the shoulder before he cut his own throat. Before the violent outburst, "he was somewhat eccentric and melancholy, but was never thought of unsound mind."²⁸

Similar stories surfaced about Confederate veterans. A one-legged, ex-soldier in Atlanta drew his pension and paid some local debts one Friday afternoon in 1897. It was business as usual until he returned home, dragged his two young sons to a nearby cottonhouse and "crushed their brains out with his wooden crutch" before sending "a pistol ball through his own brains." He drank a bottle of laudanum before he committed the deed, but no one was sure why he killed them.²⁹ The existence of mental instability among some veterans was increasingly apparent as the century drew to a close and headlines abounded with sensational titles like "Old Soldier's Brutal Crime," or "Shot by an Insane Veteran."

Historian Eric Dean has examined the connection between military experience, mental trauma, and crime in *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War*. Dean examines diaries, letters, and newspaper articles that chronicle the experiences of returning veterans, many of whom struggled to adjust to civilian life. Many veterans felt emotionally distant from their loved ones after the war. They were quick to remember scenes of battle. Dean argues that enthusiastic homecoming celebrations and family reunions "did not instantly 'wash

²⁷ "Murdered and Mutilated," *Daily Inter Ocean*, July 28, 1886.

²⁸ "A Veteran's Crime," *Daily Inter Ocean*, September 27, 1887.

²⁹ "Confederate Veteran's Crime," *Evening Bulletin*, March 20, 1897.

away' the disturbing memories of the past four years." One of the main problems returning veterans faced was an inability to "put an end to the habit of violence," an argument Dean supports with prison statistics after the war.³⁰ He also examines a sampling of veterans at the Indiana Hospital for the Insane, finding that 40 percent of the veterans there committed acts of violence while another 22 percent threatened to. Violence was often directed at the veteran's family members.³¹

Dean argues that veterans at the hospital exhibited "a range of behaviors and symptoms typical of the twentieth-century victim of post-traumatic stress disorder, including elements of depression, anxiety, social numbing, re-experiencing, fear, dread of calamity, and cognitive disorders."³² What Dean found in the Indiana Hospital is evident elsewhere. Many veterans complained of nightmares and memories that came to them unexpectedly. Dr. A. N. Ellis, a veteran and a field surgeon from Ohio, commented on the strength of his terrible memories in a paper read before the Union District Medical Society. Even in 1886, he still recalled lying wounded in a hospital, "a fearful nightmare, full of fever, pain and delirium." He introduced his paper by asking, "Where is there the old soldier who does not have the most vivid remembrance of the times he spent in the hospital—long, lingering days or weeks, perhaps months, full of suffering and only surpassed in terrible agony by the horrible realities of the battlefield?"³³

While veterans vividly remembered combat experiences, some struggled to remember

³⁰ Eric T. Dean, *Shook over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 98.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 165-166

³² *Ibid.*, 101-114.

³³ A. N. Ellis, "Notes on Hospitals and Hospital Construction," *The Cincinnati Lancet-Clinic: A Weekly Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 17 (July-December 1886): 33.

other more recent events. Francis Shepherd, the man convicted for killing John Vetter and noted at the start of this section, claimed in his defense that he had “faint, if any recollection” of the murder. Shepherd killed Vetter while on furlough from the army during the war. In *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War*, Richard Gabriel argues, “Soldiers on normal leave often collapsed with emotional illness at home even when they had shown no symptoms of mental debilitation before they left the fighting.”³⁴ Hallucinations and delusions were also frequent. In 1882, the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* published the abstract of an article that commented on the prevalence of auditory hallucinations in insane soldiers.³⁵ These and spontaneous periods of deafness were prominent symptoms that plagued veterans. Major J. Blackburn Jones, a Union veteran, was continually troubled by ringing noises. The newspaper article reporting his death commented that Jones “said that he believed his mind was becoming affected.” The ringing noises eventually drove Jones to kill himself.³⁶

R. Gregory Lande, a physician and retired U.S. Army Medical Corps officer, has written a number of articles on soldier suicides and PTSD during the Civil War. Lande’s research has revealed that a surprising surge in suicides took place in the closing months of the war, when many soldiers knew the fighting was almost over. Suicide rates continued to climb after the war, leading Lande to argue that “an epidemic of suicides among mostly young male veterans alarmed

³⁴ Richard A. Gabriel, *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 61.

³⁵ W. Julius Mickle, “Hallucinations in Progressive Paresis,” *Journal of Mental Science* (October 1881), abstract in *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 9 (January 1882): 422.

³⁶ “A Suicide’s Identification,” *Galveston Daily News*, April 19, 1896.

the country.”³⁷

The factors precipitating veteran suicide were varied. Some ended their lives because wounds received during the war years were too burdensome to them. Col. Duke Bailie, a Union veteran from Chicago, purposely severed an artery in his leg and bled to death alone in his apartment. He had been “horribly disfigured from wounds” received in his military service. The newspaper reporting his suicide recounted his many injuries: “A bayonet thrust had carried away his nose; a sabre cut had left a long ugly scar across his cheek, and one foot had been taken off by a shell.”³⁸ E. R. Becker, another Union veteran “tired of life and suffering,” committed suicide for similar reasons. “He had suffered for some time from wounds received in the late war, and discouraged somewhat to see his wife support him, deliberately shot himself.”³⁹ A veteran by the name of Thomas Miller blew off his head with a shot gun. The newspaper said he had been sickly since his discharge from the army and “his suffering is thought to have driven him insane.”⁴⁰ Men like Bailie, Becker, and Miller could not look in the mirror without seeing the war again.

Veterans also killed themselves because they could never find stable employment once they were mustered out of service. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* reported that W.A. Atwill, killed himself because he was “out of a job, and did not know what he should do, as he had

³⁷ R. Gregory Lande, “Felo De Se: Soldier Suicides in America’s Civil War,” *Military Medicine* 176, no. 5 (May 2011): 533, 531.

³⁸ “Brave Warrior Dead,” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, September 19, 1890.

³⁹ “Suicide of a Veteran of the War of the Rebellion,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, March 12, 1878.

⁴⁰ “War Veteran Kills Himself,” *Evening Herald*, February 23, 1893.

nothing to live for.” He had left his wife and daughter a few years after the war was over.⁴¹ Union veteran Richard Willis committed suicide when he found himself penniless without a roof over his head. He had been kicked out of the Yountville soldiers’ home for disobeying rules.⁴² Veterans frequently experienced problems with family members and neighbors that caused further alienation. James Fossett’s wife had witnessed so many of his suicide attempts that she did not believe he had succeeded when he shot himself in the head in the bushes across from their house. Thinking he had only fired a shot into the air, she did not even go out to look for him until several hours had passed. In an article on his suicide, *The Morning Oregonian* said the veteran was out of work and “doubtless more or less insane.”⁴³

The ways in which some veterans chose to end their lives suggest that war had a lasting effect on them. Veteran suicides were sometimes more violent and shocking than simply overdosing on morphine or drowning. Union veteran Henry Weber killed himself by lying down in front of a train. The *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat* reported that horrified witnesses watched as “the wheels passed over Weber’s body, severing it almost completely in two.”⁴⁴ Charles Zimmerman, a Union veteran from New York, drank carbolic acid to end his life. At the time of his death, he was living alone in a shabby boarding house.⁴⁵ Joel Van Meter was so desperate to kill himself that, when his wife interrupted his attempts to cut his own throat with a

⁴¹ “Suicide of a Veteran,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 13, 1888.

⁴² “Vallejo Has A Suicide,” *San Francisco Call*, September 11, 1896.

⁴³ “A Veteran’s Suicide,” *Portland Oregonian*, June 21, 1895.

⁴⁴ “A Veteran Commits Suicide,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 28, 1883.

⁴⁵ “A Destitute Veteran Kills Himself,” *Sun*, December 21, 1895.

straight razor, he “crawled to where a pair of shears was lying and began hacking away.”⁴⁶ In the soldiers’ home at Leavenworth, Kansas, Patrick Carr filled a bath tub with scalding water, climbed in, and boiled himself alive. The newspaper reported that his skin was “so badly scalded that it dropped from the bones.” Aside from the violent act which ended his life, Carr had a history of domestic disputes with his wife.⁴⁷

How veterans killed themselves spoke volumes about the horrors they had witnessed and their determination to die. In one of the most interesting cases directly linking suicide to Civil War experience, Bernard Kohm shot himself decades after his service. Kohm, a member of the Gilsey Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, decided to end his life on the doorstep of an undertaker shop to save people the trouble of taking his body there. In his suicide note, he explained that his weapon of choice was a revolver “from the battle of Antietam, a relic which I brought home from the war.” The newspaper lamented that Kohm “had gone through that great battle unhurt, and twenty-seven years after it the revolver he carried away from the field became the instrument of his death.”⁴⁸

As these examples have shown, newspapers are the best sources detailing individual cases of suicide. The cases listed here have been Union veterans, but David Silkenat addresses postwar suicide in North Carolina in his work. Silkenat, like Dean, has looked at PTSD as a possible cause for the rise in suicide after the war. He looks at the research done on Union veterans and argues that, “assuming that the Confederate military experience was at least as

⁴⁶ “A Veteran’s Suicide,” *North American*, March 13, 1896.

⁴⁷ “The Horrible Suicide of a Veteran of the War,” *Denver Evening Post*, December 1, 1897.

⁴⁸ “A Veteran’s Suicide.” *Evening World*. April 19, 1889.

traumatic as that experienced by Union soldiers, one should expect that Confederate veterans would have had comparable levels of PTSD.” Silkenat examines a number of Confederate veteran suicides and observes that being wounded in combat or experiencing a lengthy term of military service were notable contributors to rising male suicide in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

Diane Sommerville has also studied mental illness and suicide among Confederate veterans. She argues that these veterans “suffered even greater psychological damage than their Union counterparts.” More Confederate soldiers fought in the Civil War, so they were even more likely to experience mental trauma from combat. They also received no federal pensions, which placed them in a more volatile and desperate situation when the war was over. Despite the failure of asylum records, newspapers, and other contemporary sources to link mental illness and military experience, Sommerville uses a handful of individual case studies to show how Confederate veterans displayed aggressive tendencies and often ended their lives. Furthermore, she uses records from Georgia’s Milledgeville Insane Asylum to conclude that 74 percent of the veterans admitted to the asylum after the war exhibited violent behavior.⁵⁰

In 1899, the *Owingsville Outlook* published an advertisement that would have drawn the attention of a number of its readers. With the headline, “Nervous People,” the ad described the symptoms of a condition that many would have recognized. “When everything annoys you, when your pulse beats excessively; when you are startled at the least unexpected sounds,” the ad

⁴⁹ Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*, 54-57.

⁵⁰ Diane Miller Sommerville, “‘Will They Ever Be Able to Forget?’: Confederate Soldiers and Mental Illness in the Defeated South,” in *Weirding the War Stories from the Civil War’s Ragged Edges*, ed. Stephen William Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 322-325.

warned, “your nerves are in a bad state and should be promptly attended to.” It proposed a cure, a miracle elixir known as Dr. Williams’ Pink Pills for Pale People would calm the nerves of anyone who took the drug.⁵¹ Nerves were indeed a problem for many people in the latter half of the nineteenth century. With the return of psychologically troubled veterans after the war, tensions were high. These veterans were diagnosed with “nervous disease,” but their suffering and their actions were poorly understood by those around them. Some veterans returned from the war forever changed, and this change could manifest itself in violence, in the crime, and in the suicides that marked the end of many old soldiers’ lives. Their tragic stories played out in asylums, rest homes, and prisons, documented in newspapers that showed issues with veteran readjustment but offered no real understanding or cure for the problem.

⁵¹ “Nervous People,” *Owingsville Outlook*, May 11, 1899.

VI. Conclusion

In 1865, the American Temperance Union produced a tract for Civil War veterans that has already been noted in the second chapter of this study. Titled, “Mustered Out-Now Look Out,” the tract was meant to warn homecoming soldiers about the dangers of alcohol. Though this was the tract’s primary purpose, the document’s words were applicable to many of the problems veterans faced after the war. It also warned against pick pockets and vandals who might prey on recently discharged veterans. Veterans must be ever vigilant lest they be taken advantage of and abused. In closing, however, the tract was most concerned with how the soldiers themselves would respond to a difficult homecoming. Lest the reputation of the brave warriors be diminished, “let it be said now that the soldier who followed Grant and Sherman and Sheridan may be trusted—that he is an honest man as well as a hero.” The veteran’s conduct must be beyond reproach, or he would be an embarrassment to his nation. “Let him be an honor to the country which has been saved by the loyalty and valor of the army and the navy,” the pamphlet advised. “The soldiers who kept our national honor untarnished and our State from dismemberment should be foremost in every good word and work.”¹

These words were a charge that some did not fulfill. Some veterans committed crimes, became alcoholics and addicts, and brought their aggression home. To be fair, the public did not hold up their end of the bargain. “Society should realize that it owes the soldier something besides a pension and a jubilant reception,” the tract insisted. “Every patriotic citizen should constitute himself a committee to watch with sleepless and patient vigilance for the welfare of

¹ George W. Bungay, *Mustered Out-Now Look Out* (New York: American Temperance Union, 1865), 3.

the disbanded volunteer.”² People should notice the needs of soldiers and ease their transition back into society. This was hard to do for many reasons discussed in this study. People wanted to believe there would be no problems in the homecoming. This and a contextual ignorance about mental health blinded people to the struggle of veteran readjustment. Alcohol flowed through the armies, and discipline was inconsistent. Soldiers with problems readjusting filtered into soldiers’ homes, asylums, and prisons. These facilities struggled to deal with veteran misbehavior and mental trauma. All of these factors affected the treatment of veteran violence and its perception after the Civil War.

² Ibid.

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