2017

"Our Captain is a Gentleman": Officer Elections among Virginia Confederates, 1861-1862

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"Our Captain is a Gentleman": Officer Elections among Virginia Confederates, 1861-1862

A thesis submitted in partial requirements for the degree of Master of History at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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9 May 2017
Acknowledgements

Without the guidance, support, knowledge, and patience of Dr. Kathryn Shively-Meier this thesis would never have come to fruition. Working with her has made me a better historian, writer, and scholar of the Civil War. To her I owe an extreme debt of gratitude. John Deal at the Library of Virginia has been a sounding board for this thesis and my career for over two years. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with him. The faculty at VCU Department of History have been instrumental in my development. Particular thanks go to Dr. Ryan K. Smith and Debbi Price for listening, advising, and supporting me throughout this process. My parents have endured decades of sprawling stacks of Civil War books in their home. It is with a large degree of satisfaction that I can present this thesis as a small product of their patience. This thesis would also not have been possible were it not for the support and patience of my girlfriend Celia. Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to the memory of the late Charles B. O’Brien, author, grandfather, and inspiration.
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Abstract

"Our Captain is a Gentleman”: Officer Elections among Virginia Confederates, 1861-1862

By Ryan C. O'Hallahan, Bachelor of Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015

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Enlisted soldiers preferred to elect company- and regimental-level officers during the first year of the American Civil War. This thesis explores how early Confederate mobilization, class conflict between elites and non-elites, and Confederate military policies affected officer elections from spring 1861 to spring 1862 among Virginia Confederates. Chapter 1 explores how the chaotic nature of mobilization and common soldiers' initial expectations regarding their military service influenced elections from April 1861 until late July 1861. Chapter 2 details the changing nature of elections as elite officers faced challenges from non-elites and Confederate policies regarding furloughs and conscription forced officers to reconcile their men’s expectations of loose discipline with directives from senior commanders.
Introduction
William Poague, a lawyer from Rockbridge County, enlisted in the Rockbridge Artillery in April 1861, and the men of the battery immediately wanted to elect Poague as an officer. However, Poague “did not want an office in the company simply because I was not qualified for it.” Qualified or not, Virginia Confederates elected hundreds of junior officers during spring 1861. Those deemed unqualified were turned out of office at subsequent elections largely because the qualities Virginians prized most in elected officers changed with experience, as enlisted men transitioned from green to veteran soldiers. This thesis is a social history about officer elections among Confederate Virginia units during the first year of the war with emphasis on how mobilization, class, and Confederate policies influenced elections. The chaotic nature of mobilization, as well as the expectations Virginians held, both about military service and their officers, in early 1861 affected initial officer elections during April, May, and June 1861. These expectations changed after First Manassas and officers attempted to negotiate these changing expectations by a variety of means. Enlisted Virginians resented being asked to accept army discipline, thereby giving up a large degree of their autonomy. By refusing to relinquish what enlisted men considered a vital part of their democratic rights, enlisted Virginians tremendously shaped the junior officer corps of the Army of Northern Virginia during 1861 and 1862.

The traditional military chain of command suggests that junior officers should have held the power in their interactions with enlisted soldiers. Yet, the reverse was true in 1861 and the spring of 1862. Enlisted soldiers wielded surprising influence over company- and regimental-level superiors because of the democratic tradition of junior officer elections. Whether consciously or unconsciously, officers knew each action they took would later be scrutinized.

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2 Because this thesis studies the Confederate experience, Confederate names for battles are used.
when the time for re-election came. Officers could not afford smoldering resentments among their troops if they expected to gain re-election. Enlisted soldiers took advantage of their role as officer electors to force concessions from their officers, most notably expecting furloughs and loose discipline. Many junior officers felt compelled to submit to their men’s demands, straining against mandates from their own superiors to maintain discipline. As a result, junior officers held the least amount of power during the first year of the war.

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Many historians have also viewed the election of elites as a matter of course because of elites’ wealth and power in the community. I find this to be true albeit with a caveat. Prospective officers could not rely on wealth or tradition alone to warrant election in spring 1861; the rank and file expected elites to use their wealth to provide tangible, material support for their men, such as clothing, weapons, and equipment. Therefore it was not an officer’s wealth or privilege alone, but his actions which strengthened his chances of being elected.

A case study on Virginia officer elections is compelling for several reasons. Scholars have focused heavily on Virginia, both during the antebellum period and during the war since Virginia was the most populous Confederate state in 1860 and was economically and socially diverse. Thus, there is rich data regarding Virginia society and demographics with which to construct an argument. Since over twenty five percent of the Army of Northern Virginia (the major Confederate army in the east) were residents of Virginia in 1860, a study of Virginia units offers a good indication of overall patterns in the Army of Northern Virginia.

While much recent Civil War scholarship focuses on common soldiers and life in the ranks, officers have

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3 Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Soldiering in the Army of Northern Virginia: A Statistical Portrait of the Troops Who Served under Robert E. Lee* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), x-xi, 4. Glatthaar constructed a sample size of 600 soldiers from the Army of Northern Virginia using a “stratified cluster sample” where 300 infantry soldiers, and 150 each from the artillery and cavalry were selected and then randomly sampled from those categories. According to Glatthaar’s sample, almost 40% of the Army of Northern Virginia were Virginians.
received less attention. Historian James McPherson found that “some 10 or 12 percent of all Confederate soldiers served as officers for at least half of their time in the army.”[4] Such a large segment of a military force, especially a segment which commanded the majority, demands continued exploration.

The period from early mobilization in spring 1861 to the spring 1862 reorganization, when the Army of Northern Virginia had a final, largescale round of officer elections, is key to studying officer elections during the Civil War. While officer elections continued to occur throughout the war, the first year of the war saw the largest volume of elections because after spring 1862, the Confederate government outlawed officer elections. The first year of the war is also when the majority of soldiers transitioned from believing in romantic ideals about military service to experiencing the reality of marching, drilling, cramped quarters, poor food, and submission to discipline. Spring 1861 offers a look at how mobilization affected officer elections, and spring 1862 sheds light on how Confederate military policies affected elections during the reorganization and re-enlistment phase prior to the spring campaign in the east.

There are several concepts used in this thesis that require exploration. A citizen-soldier is someone who, when called upon to serve in a military capacity, takes up arms, leaving behind his civilian life temporarily for the life of a soldier. Citizen-soldiers can be called into state service, usually in the militia, or federal service, federal volunteers. Citizen-soldiers stand in juxtaposition to professional soldiers, who have chosen military service as their vocation and serve in the regular army. Americans’ antipathy towards a standing army in the early republic period, combined with a belief that American citizen-soldiers could successfully answer military threats to the new country, left the United States Regular Army small in size and small in the

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esteeom ordinary Americans. Americans viewed professional soldiers and citizen-soldiers as ideologically different. They believed professional, or regular soldiers enlisted in the army because they lacked a viable profession or skill. Not only did professional soldiers appear indolent and unskilled, they willingly subordinated their free will to a higher authority. To common folk grounded in Jeffersonian ideals of egalitarianism and individualism, men who voluntarily sacrificed their autonomy seemed suspicious. Due to an ingrained citizen tradition as well as Americans’ commitment to democratic principles, officer elections were the prescribed manner in which militia and volunteer units selected their officers during the early republic and antebellum period.

Officer elections during the Civil War closely followed the established citizen-soldier tradition among American military units. Historian Andrew Bledsoe argued “the American citizen-soldier ethos shaped the nature of officer selection” during the war and defined this ethos as “civic virtue in the form of military service, a claim on the revolutionary heritage won by force of arms, suspicion of standing armies, and a sense of egalitarianism and political involvement that manifested as mutual dependence between soldiers, officers, and the state.” Thus, Bledsoe gave specific definition and precedent to officer elections during the Civil War. The citizen-soldier tradition helps us, on one hand, appreciate why Virginia Confederates valued officer elections, and, on the other hand, explains why enlisted men tested the limits of military discipline. Because soldiers conceived of themselves as citizens engaged in a military contract between themselves and their government, they felt entitled to the rights of citizens, including the right to choose their leaders. Recently established universal male suffrage in Virginia, which

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5 Richard Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 4.
6 Ibid, 50-51.
declared all white men political equals, further contributed to a sense of entitlement regarding officer elections. Historian Wayne Hsieh argued that soldiers began the war with “a set of cultural expectations rooted in an Anglo-American martial tradition that had glorified the civic and military virtue of the studiously unprofessional citizen-soldier.” Newly enfranchised white men decried the apparent aristocratic status of professional officers from the Old Army. As Hsieh elucidated, matters were further complicated, because civilian leaders quickly realized the need for professional, regular army leadership, but feared trampling on the citizen-soldier tradition of democratic officer elections.

Just as citizens recognized a difference between professional soldiers and the militia, citizens also viewed state level militia troops and state volunteers as distinct groups during the antebellum and the Civil War eras. The 1792 Militia Act allowed each state to organize a state-level militia from all white males between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. Penalties existed for any enrolled militia member who failed to show up to annual or bi-annual musters, a sore point for many poorer white men since wealthier whites could afford the fine. Thus, as historian Russell Weigley noted, American militias “came to be divided into the unorganized and the organized” with the majority being “organized” only on paper. By the Mexican-American War, militia troops had proven themselves unreliable and militia service had “deteriorated into social clubs,” according to historian Richard Winders. Such an atmosphere led state governments to rarely enforce militia fines and neglect the general up-keep of militia units.

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8 The Constitution of 1850 abolished property requirements and gave all white Virginia males aged twenty-one and older the right to vote in state elections.
10 Ibid.
12 Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 25.
During the antebellum era, wealthier whites, disdainful of compulsory service with yeoman in the militia, decided to form state volunteer companies. State volunteers could claim a greater patriotism since they served of their own accord. Because only the wealthy could afford to pay the fine to skip state militia musters, volunteer companies became composed of elite and wealthy members. Most volunteer companies required members to buy their own uniforms and equipment, and since many volunteer uniforms were patterned after stylish European garb, membership could be quite expensive. Further, expensive dinners, clubhouses, and parades necessitated a further drain on members’ resources ensuring that “capacity and readiness to pay seemed to guarantee that only the respectable would join their ranks.”

As militia units were drained of manpower and state governments contributed less and less to maintain their militias, “the vast majority of volunteer companies [were] incorporated within the state militias, at least on paper,” and by the “second or third decade of the nineteenth century, the elite companies were joined and swamped by a mass of others, chiefly composed of clerks [and] artisans.” Thus, by the time of the Civil War, volunteer companies and militia companies were rather interchangeable since the majority of Virginia militia companies existed first as volunteer units, which then became part of the Virginia militia forces. As a result, when Virginians went to war in spring 1861, it was as volunteer citizen-soldiers rather than as compelled members of the militia. Thus, while some Virginians had experience in state level volunteer units, others joined the Confederate army directly as federal volunteers, a special designation given to citizen-soldiers called directly into federal service. Enlisted soldiers expected to be treated as

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14 Ibid, 220, 223.
volunteers, not regular soldiers, by their officers and the Confederate high command, and so the Confederate Conscription Act of 1862 had the effect of changing the nature of enlisted service.

The terms elite and non-elite also need definition. This thesis uses historian Timothy Lockley’s definition of non-elites as “whites who did not own substantial amounts of property.”15 This definition does have its exceptions, however. Joseph Glatthaar determined that although the median wealth of a soldier in the Army of Northern Virginia was zero dollars, this figure is misleading.16 Many soldiers, (seven of eleven) lived in another person’s household. The relative youth (the median birth year was 1838) meant that many soldiers had not had time to begin a career, accumulate wealth, or own slaves.17 Thus, while many soldiers appeared on census records as having no personal wealth or not owning slaves, they lived in households which did own slaves. Since companies were formed among local communities, local knowledge of households meant that even though people might appear poor on paper, the local community would know the reality. What it meant to be elite differed by community, and so one must use the term elite according to local perception rather than statistical data. Thus, this thesis defines elite as those men who either owned significant amounts of property themselves or came from families which owned significant amounts of property, relative to the rest of their local community.

A brief discussion of Civil War organization is necessary to better understand officer elections and military policies. A Civil War company was officially composed of between eighty to one hundred men, but in practice companies rarely exceeded more than sixty men able

16 Glatthaar, Soldiering in the Army of Northern Virginia, 7. Glatthaar determined that since many Confederates were still living with their parents during the 1860 Census, many soldiers appeared to have no wealth of their own. However, this does not mean those men lacked access to wealth.
17 Ibid, 3-7.
for duty beyond initial enlistment. Sickness and death, transfers, and absent members quickly
dwindled numbers. A regiment consisted of ten companies and a brigade consisted of two to six
regiments, with four or five regiments as the norm. Thus, in theory a regiment would number
1,000 men and a brigade from 3,000 to 6,000. Realistically, however, a regiment numbered
between two hundred and five hundred at any given time.

The study of officer elections is a subfield of Civil War studies which is yet burgeoning.
The amount of secondary material from which to draw is paltry compared to other topics of the
Civil War. Nevertheless, certain works proved especially useful in helping me frame my
argument as well as identifying avenues of research. The historians who have investigated
company level officers have not adequately explored the expectations that enlisted soldiers
placed on officers and how officers responded to those demands.

Historian Kevin Ruffner provided necessary insight into junior officers by “elucidat[ing] the
makeup, influences, goals, and experiences” of Maryland’s junior officers.18 However,
Ruffner focused heavily on officer experience with little study of how enlisted men shaped
officers’ experiences. Officers’ experiences and goals during the war cannot be understood
without a study of the expectations they were forced to try to fulfill. Officer experience cannot
be understood without placing that experience within the confines of the election tradition and
experience.

Charles E. Brooks’ work argued that those men who could “win the loyalty and support
of common white men by looking out for their interests and knowing when to stand back and let
them have their own way” stood a better chance of gaining election and proved more effective as

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Brooks showed through statistical analysis that the majority of officers elected in Hood’s Brigade were wealthy, slave owning Texans, maintaining the antebellum social and power structure remained the same. Enlisted troops were guided by elite, wealthy, slaveholders just as they were before the war. Brooks’ article opens many avenues of inquiry which invite more research. Brooks found that Hood’s men operated under a system of conditional paternalism and his findings led me to search for similar patterns among Virginia units in the same army. Virginia enlisted troops expected paternalistic leadership from their officers, while still demanding autonomy and liberty. Thus, just like their Texas brethren, Virginia officers had to learn to negotiate the dichotomous aspects of conditional paternalism.

Both Charles Brooks and Steven Elliot Tripp argued that antebellum elites established a power structure in which elites largely barred non-elites entry to political positions and that this system extended to officer elections during the war. However, my research indicates that this trend held true for just the first few months of the war. After the Battle of First Manassas, non-elite soldiers began to challenge elite officers in elections. Furthermore, non-elite men did not

20 Before the war, paternalism was a social system in which white men usually subordinated women, slaves, and children, supposedly in their best interests. Society expected paternal figures to provide materially and spiritually for those under their care. There was little room for autonomy within the paternal system and women, slaves, and children were expected to obey paternal figures unconditionally. All white men, however humble in means, had some degree of social power and self-autonomy within the south’s paternalistic society, however. Enlisted soldiers placed paternal expectations, specifically regarding their material and spiritual welfare, upon their officers, yet enlisted men expected to retain the liberty their race, age, and gender granted them. Thus, enlisted soldiers expected their officers to act as paternal figures, yet enlisted men did not wish to give up their democratic freedoms. I term this conditional paternalism. For studies of antebellum and wartime paternalism see Stephen W. Berry, All That Makes A Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), Eugene Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), Thavolia Glymph, Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
follow unwritten rules regarding gentlemanly conduct during elections, which led to bitter elections and hurt feelings among elite officers and officer candidates.

As historian Peter Carmichael recognized, many elite officers did perceive a need to transcend class differences. Carmichael suggested that elite officers “were repeatedly forced to compromise, to negotiate, and to enter into dialogue with enlisted men who realized that the Confederacy’s success ultimately depended on their willingness to serve.” Carmichael’s use of the word “forced” is apt as many elite officers preferred conscription, rather than compromise, as a way to fill the ranks of the Confederate army in spring 1862. As Carmichael pointed out, officers used their piety and moral authority to influence enlisted soldiers. In addition to Carmichael’s argument, I argue that religion influenced conceptions surrounding paternalism among Virginia Confederates. Officers often practiced paternalism through a religious lens and used religion to perfect their company’s morals, a practice thought by many to improve discipline and thus, efficacy in battle. Officers were in danger of being portrayed as aristocratic tyrants if they attempted to manage and discipline their men too closely. Carmichael posited that even if an officer was “a tyrant in camp” he could “redeem himself” with displays of bravery in battle. Vindicating displays of bravery may have saved some officers positions, but prior to the spring 1862 battle campaigns, which occurred after elections in spring 1862, officers had few chances to demonstrate bravery on the battlefield. Thus, tyrannical behavior in camp played a larger role than in officer selection than Carmichael documented.

Carmichael also pointed out that officers were forced to allow certain indisciplines in order to maintain their own positions; for example, “French” furloughs were chief among

23 Ibid, 162.
ignored transgressions and large numbers of Virginia Confederates went absent without leave during the winter of 1861-1862.\textsuperscript{24} While Carmichael noted the predicament officers were placed in when Confederate authorities began to demand tougher discipline regarding unauthorized furloughs, he did not assess the impact Confederate furlough policies had on officer elections in spring 1862. This thesis provides greater evidence to support Carmichael’s assertion that junior officers “adeptly skirted Confederate policy without jeopardizing military efficiency or morale.”\textsuperscript{25}

Electioneering, the practice of courting votes or campaigning, exacerbated existing class tensions during Virginia junior officer elections. Andrew Bledsoe argued that electioneering allowed enlisted troops to “define the terms of their service” by forcing the officers they elected to be “affable…charismatic, and project…an air of confidence.”\textsuperscript{26} He further argued that electioneering “broke down social and economic divisions among classes.”\textsuperscript{27} However, I found that in Virginia regiments and batteries, elite officers and officer candidates usually proved unwilling to engage in electioneering, a practice they considered beneath their dignity. After all, in the antebellum period elites relied on class privilege and their reputation during political elections and so campaigning among non-elites was an affront to elites. In Virginia Confederate units, electioneering produced extreme divisiveness and acrimony among candidates, which, in turn, affected the larger unit.

Nepotism was responsible for a small percentage of officer commissions among Virginia Confederates. Bledsoe argued that personal and political patronage accounted for a large number

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 154-155. “French” furlough was a term for what was technically desertion but in actuality an attempt to forcibly take a furlough home rather than permanently desert from the army.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 155.
\textsuperscript{26} Bledsoe, Citizen-Officers, 39.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
of officer commissions during the Civil War. In Virginia, however, most such appointments occurred in the first few months of the war and almost all of these appointments were staff positions or field grade officer posts. Virginia militia law already gave the governor the right to appoint field grade officers, and the immediate mobilization of Virginia’s state forces meant an increase in the number of available staff positions. After the spring of 1862, when Confederate policies curtailed military elections, nepotism was a regular, if uncommon, feature of company level officer appointments. Familial connections to politicians, high ranking officers, and bureaucrats often resulted in officer appointments later in the war. There is very little evidence, however, to show nepotism at work in Virginia company-level elections between 1861 and spring 1862.

Although there were thousands of Confederate officers elected during the Civil War, and copious amounts of primary sources exist from Confederate soldiers, primary source research on officer elections is extremely difficult. I began this thesis by attempting to find out why one man was elected instead of another. What qualities did enlisted men look for in their officers? Were certain qualities prized over others at certain points in the war? For example, why was Second Corporal Joseph M. Anderson of the 46th Virginia Infantry elevated to First Lieutenant during the spring 1862 reorganization? Was he more affable, more capable, wealthier, better educated, or more lenient than William J. Williams, the Flint Hill Rifles former captain who failed to get re-elected?\textsuperscript{28} Pure statistical and biographical data was not enough to tell such a story. Unfortunately, primary evidence cannot tell such a story, either. Showing causal effect is a difficult task for any historian. The available sources humbled my aspirations and instead produced a study aimed at finding what enlisted soldiers expected from their officers and how

those expectations manifested themselves in officer elections as well as interacted with events during the first year of the Civil War.

Letters, memoirs, diaries, and newspapers each presented their own limitations. I made little use of newspapers and diaries; however, I heavily used published and unpublished letters and memoirs, with a preference toward published sources. Archival research on officer elections is difficult. Few references appear in reading guides and library references to officer elections, making finding primary material a true needle-in-a-haystack chore. Each type of primary source presented its own difficulty. Letters, while contemporary to the events taking place, were often less than forthcoming with the whole truth, especially regarding comrades. Soldiers were aware that their letters home would be read aloud in public spaces, whether in the home or in the community, and were careful with criticisms of others. For example, William Blackford, Senior wrote to his son Lancelot “Lanty” Blackford of the Rockbridge Artillery and asked “you never said much of your Captain or officers? How do you like them?” The younger Blackford’s next letter home contained general camp news and then, a second section, headed by “PRIVATE,” in which he gave his father his opinion of his officers. Thus, letters are useful for what they contain but also just as notable for what they do not say.

Diaries and newspapers were used sparingly in this thesis. In contrast to letters, the sole diary used for this thesis displays a high level of emotion and lack of concern for tact. Private James Hall of the 31st Virginia was particularly critical of his officers in his diary. Newspapers yielded fewer insights than I imagined they would. I intended to make heavy use of newspapers

29 In transcribing and quoting primary sources I have left all words and punctuation as I found them. None of the sources were unintelligible as they were.
30 William Blackford, Sr., to “Lanty” Blackford, 27 October 1861, Accession #6403-h-i, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. (Hereafter cited as UVA).
31 “Lanty” Blackford to father, 21 November 1861, UVA.
by examining recruiting advertisements but found few such advertisements. The four major Richmond newspapers were largely concerned with national news and the major armies than they were with reporting on local units. Richmond’s transition from state capital and provincial city to national capital most likely accounts for this. Newspapers in other cities, such as Alexandria, were allowed to continue to publish under Union occupation but offer little in the way of Confederate news. The Petersburg *Daily Express* proved most useful in providing information about early mobilization and since it remained a provincial city, if offers the most information concerning local units.

Confederate memoirs, almost all written during the Lost Cause era, are problematical for several reasons. First, similar to letters, ex-Confederates were reluctant to criticize former comrades. Candid portraits of officers are rare and memoirs detailed only exceptionally poor behavior from officers. Many memoirs contain minimal details regarding elections. A typical example comes from Private, later Captain, French Harding’s memoir. Harding’s discussion of elections was simply a list of those officers elected with no indication as to why those certain men were elected over others. Ex-Confederates also tended to romanticize their military service and promote Lost Cause ideology and so memoirs must be kept within their proper historical context. Lost Cause myths were largely centered on the righteousness both of the Confederate cause as well as the men who supported it. Thus, Lost Cause memoirs tend to paint

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a picture of Confederate soldiers as unimpeachable in their character making it hard to capture the truth. I have treated memoirs as factual, yet I chose not to include material which had an overt Lost Cause ideology.

Officer elections involved officers, officer candidates, and enlisted soldiers. This study makes heavier use of sources from officers than from enlisted soldiers. Officers were often more concerned with abstract ideas and policies than enlisted soldiers and so, for this study, proved especially useful. Enlisted and non-elite soldiers tended to write of more common events such as diet, weather, and travel. This is not surprising since most soldiers were farmers and few had traveled far from home in their lives. Officers also tended to come from what I define as the elite class. Their families, in many cases, were prominent in colonial, antebellum, and post-war eras; indeed, many of the officers used in this study were prominent themselves in the post-war era. In the past, archives tended to accept papers from primarily socially prominent families. This lead to extensive collections for elite families in Virginia archives and tends to skew primary source material toward men of elite backgrounds. Where possible I have attempted to view elections from the viewpoint of enlisted soldiers, though this proved difficult in many instances from a lack of evidence.

In chapter one, I look at how prospective captains attempted to manifest recruits’ romanticized fantasies of military service with promises of certain weapons, uniforms, and service in a specific arms branch. Sometimes captains were wealthy enough to fulfill such promises from their own pockets; other captains had to use a variety of means to attempt to make good on their recruiting promises. A captain’s ability to meet his soldier’s romantic ideals led to either his successful election or loss in spring 1861. Challenges to elite officer’s status by enlisted soldiers, particularly through the process of electioneering, left many elites angry and
led to disharmony among units. Chapter two focuses on the period after the Battle of First Manassas, when soldiers began to experience the harsh reality of Civil War military service. Accordingly, their expectations underwent a transformation. Current and prospective officers had to amend their leadership styles to suit their soldiers’ new demands. Officers also had to find ways to maintain discipline and enforce Confederate military policies, while at the same time securing their positions as officers and appeasing their troops’ expectations as citizen-soldiers. Conflict resolution between officers and enlisted men often took the form of a class struggle as elite officers succeeded or failed at compromising with their men. The most successful officers compromised their own class principles, specifically regarding electioneering. Often, officers used their status as moral Christians and as paternal figures to transcend these class differences.

Ultimately, large scale and chaotic mobilization meant many Virginia Confederates had to depend on sources outside their state and national governments to provide clothing, weapons, and equipage. Accordingly, they elected officers financially disposed to provide the necessities of war. The often elite backgrounds of wealthy officers frequently caused social tensions when non-elite enlisted soldiers bristled at the condescension and perceived social superiority of elite officers. At the same time, soldiers of all ranks and classes had to adjust their expectations about military service. Soldiers began to experience the harsh realities of war after the battle of First Manassas, and these hard experiences changed expectations for their officers. Elections in 1862 were characterized by the pressure of Confederate governmental and military policies, specifically regarding conscription and furloughs. Throughout the process of officer elections, enlisted men never stopped trying to assert what they felt were their rights according to the citizen soldier tradition; Virginia Confederates remained citizens at heart. Thus, officers were
successful based upon how well they lived up to enlisted expectations, not in how assertive officers were of their rights of rank. Officer elections during the first year of the Civil War provide valuable insight into how enlisted men and officers in Virginia units dealt with mobilization, class tensions, and Confederate policies.
Chapter I
The chaos that surrounded early war mobilization, as Virginia units scrambled to equip, arm, and train, obfuscated the true nature of Confederate military service: long marches, bad food, homesickness, and disease. Virginia Confederates enlisted in spring 1861 with romantic ideas about military service, largely born of antebellum militia experience. Prospective officers were expected to fulfill these ideals as well as provide their men with clothing, arms, and equipment, items in short supply in Virginia’s woefully unprepared arsenals. Thus, officer elections in the wars early months hinged mostly on a captain’s ability to provide material support to his men and had little to do with his military acumen. Captains were expected to provide this material support either from their own pockets or wield enough social and political influence to raise funds or have state war material diverted to their company. Because of this expectation, officers elected in the first few months of the war tended to be wealthy and elite citizens. Newly enlisted soldiers had only assumptions, societal pressures, and antebellum reputation to use when electing officers in early 1861. Many elected officers had no previous military experience outside of militia service and so most obtained copies of drill manuals and did their best to educate themselves in warfare, yet, demonstrated military skill was in scant supply during the spring officer elections of 1861.

In contrast to the relatively conflict-free elections of spring 1861, elections in the summer of 1861 featured evidence of class conflict. Once the chaos of early mobilization had tapered, older elites, younger elites, and non-elites quibbled bitterly. In particular, differing ideas on acceptable democratic practices, chiefly centered on electioneering, contributed to much of the animosity. These acrimonious elections led to high officer turnover in the summer, fall, and winter of 1861. High officer turnover in turn necessitated more elections that led to still greater turmoil.
Virginians were no strangers to hostile feelings. Virginia citizens entered February 1861 divided over secession, but by late April 1861, the secession “crisis” served to unite rather than split Virginians. The early months of 1861 were fraught with apprehension, excitement, fear, and optimism for Virginia citizens. South Carolina had dissolved its bond with the United States on December 20, 1860, and six other states had done so as well by the time Virginians went to the polls on February 4, 1861, to decide whether the Commonwealth should hold a secession convention of its own. This was also the day that ex-President John Tyler, at the head of the so-called Peace Conference, convened with notable politicians from yet-to-secede Southern states and Northern politicians who hoped for a compromise. The Washington Peace Convention first met on February 4, 1861, with the intention of crafting a plan acceptable to both Northerners and Southerners on the issue of slavery, particularly slavery in American territories, that would avert a Civil War and further disunion. Delegates from twenty-one states attended, but ultimately, Tyler and the other delegates were unsuccessful. The fate of Virginia would rest with Virginians themselves, especially in the hands of the men elected to represent voters at the secession convention in Richmond that debated secession at exactly the same time as the peace delegates labored for union in Washington.

In confirmation of prevailing Virginia Unionism, voters showed extreme reluctance to elect secessionists delegates, and less than twenty percent of those elected could be considered open secessionists.34 From the election of delegates on February 4, to the first (failed) secession vote by the convention on April 4, to the morning of April 12, when Fort Sumter was fired on, the majority of Virginia secession delegates demonstrated reluctance to part with their country.

Indeed, the first vote for secession failed by forty-five votes to eighty-eight. Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s subsequent call for troops to suppress the rebellion tipped moderate and Unionist delegates toward secession. Finally, in the early afternoon hours of April 17, the delegates in Richmond voted Virginia out of the Union by a tally of eighty-eight to fifty-five. The Old Dominion had left the country it helped form to embark on a new, bloody four-year period in its history.

Virginians were able to unite around a common defense of hearth and home and slavery. Historian Andrew Torget argued during the “crisis” that “local Whigs and Democrats [in the Shenandoah Valley] abandoned traditional two-party politics...local politicians and newspapers in the counties began to show remarkable uniformity in their politics.” For example, this political unity was manifest in Southampton County, located where the Tidewater meets the Piedmont. Southampton voters tallied four hundred eighty-six votes for a secessionist candidate and four hundred and fifty-eight for a Unionist during the February 4, election of delegates. As deeply politically divided as Southampton was in early February, it could not have been less so in May; when voters returned to the polls to ratify Virginia’s secession, all nine hundred twenty-one voters voted in favor of secession. Historian Daniel Crofts stated that “the outbreak of war in April appeared to erase previous disagreements about secession in Southampton.”

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36 Ibid, 18.
40 Ibid.
argument can be applied to almost all localities in Virginia (with exceptions in those counties which eventually formed West Virginia).

Virginians also cast aside their political allegiances and ideologies when it came time to elect their officers. None of the primary sources used in this thesis discussed instances where soldiers considered an officer candidate’s antebellum political beliefs. An officer’s personality and character was much more important than any beliefs he held before the war; simply being a Virginian in Confederate uniform was proof of where someone’s loyalties truly lay. Soon-to-be artillery captain William Poague noted that in Lexington “where the lines between Unionist and the Secessionists were so broadly marked, where party feeling ran high and where serious clashes were with difficulty prevented, all differences forever disappeared as soon as news of Lincoln’s call for troops reached the town.”41 Edward Moore, a student at Washington College during Virginia’s secession, also in Lexington, happily reminisced that although relations between the cadets of the Virginia Military Institute and the collegians at Washington College had been somewhat tense, secession “opened up the way for quite intimate and friendly relations between the two institutions.”42 Even among the delegates at the Convention, who had spent months hurling invectives back and forth, there was “the most complete tergiversation of men and measures that I had conceived possible” once Lincoln called for troops and secession had been decided upon.43

Historian Aaron Sheehan-Dean argued that “because of the transformative nature of secession,” Virginians enlistment patterns diverged widely from their antebellum political

41 Poague, Gunner with Stonewall, 2.
stances. John S. Mosby, the noted cavalry leader, seemed almost amused in later years to remember that he was the only Douglas Democrat in Abingdon, and as a result, people closely watched Mosby for signs of disloyalty in the months leading to secession. Mosby’s prompt enlistment, however, served to quell any more public questioning of where his heart lay. Gunner Poague’s pre-war law partner, a Breckinridge Democrat, asked him to remain and look after the practice since he felt that his support for Breckinridge compelled him to “go into military service at once.” Poague himself had voted for John Bell (as had the majority of Virginians), the Constitutional Union candidate, so perhaps his partner felt that if there was dying to be done it ought to be done by those who supported the war initially. Virginians of all political backgrounds coalesced in the early months of the war around a common defense of Virginia and of slavery. Thus, antebellum and wartime political affiliation was not a factor in officer elections.

The companies in which Virginians enlisted early in 1861 were formed in a few different ways. On February 28, 1861, the Confederate Congress authorized the creation of the Provisional Army of the Confederacy which was to enlist troops for service in the war but that would be disbanded after cessation of hostilities. Virtually all members of the Confederate military served in the Provisional Army of the Confederacy. The regular, standing army was

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45 In the 1860 Presidential Election, the Democratic Party ran two candidates as a result of a split between Northern and Southern Democrats at the 1860 Democratic Convention. The Southern candidate was John S. Breckinridge, a former Vice-President from Kentucky while the Northern Democrats ran Stephen Douglas, US Senator from Illinois.
48 For examples of how Virginian’s shifted their loyalties from the United States to the Confederate States see Gary Gallagher, *Becoming Confederates: Paths to a New National Loyalty* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013). See particularly Gallagher’s study of Jubal Early who began the war as a strict Unionist and ended the war one of the Confederacy’s most virulent defenders.
called the Army of the Confederate States of America and never had more than a few thousand men on its rolls. It was used mostly to grant commission and staff positions to officers. On March 6, 1861, President Davis called for 100,000 troops from the seceded states and the first Confederate regiments began to form from men from the seven Deep South states.49

It was not until May 23, 1861 (the date Virginia voters ratified the Ordinance of Secession) that Virginia troops began entering Confederate service. Prior to that date, all Virginia troops had entered service for the state of Virginia. New volunteers had three options for entering service: new companies in the federal volunteers, militia companies, and the Provisional Army. Almost all troops enlisted for twelve months, and the vast majority of Virginia Confederates enlisted in volunteer companies that formed immediately after Virginia’s secession. These men typically elected their officers before they enlisted in service and after the men felt they had enough men to be considered a full company. In the early months this number could have been anywhere from forty to over one hundred. Captains then had two choices regarding the official mustering of their company. They could offer the company’s services directly to the Confederate government, in which case they would be placed with other independent companies into a regiment or they could form a regiment with other companies and present the new regiment to the government for mustering. Most captains chose to form regiments with other companies since this method gave them the right to elect field grade officers.50

49 South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.
50 United States War Department, John Sheldon Moody, et al., *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies Series 4, Volume 1* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 608-609. (Hereafter cited as OR). Confederate Secretary of War Leroy P. Walker wrote to Governor Moore of Alabama to assure him all new enlistees retained the right to elect company level officers and if those companies formed into complete regiments prior to mustering into Confederate service, they retained the right to elect their field grade officers. Thus, most companies chose to form regiments rather than enter service as independent companies. Field grade officers were responsible for an entire regiment as opposed to a single company. The three field grade ranks were Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, and Major.
Pre-existing militia companies were a less attractive enlistment option to the early volunteers. A small number of troops, however, did enlist in existing militia companies, some of which dated back to the Revolutionary War, or in one of the numerous companies that formed in the wake of John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry in December 1859. The militia of Virginia was a woefully undermanned and under equipped force in 1861. Adjutant General William H. Richardson reported to Governor John Letcher that of the little over 12,000 militia infantry, only about two-thirds were armed. The artillery was even worse off. Only about half of the militia artillery batteries actually had cannon.\footnote{James I. Robertson Jr., ed., \textit{Proceedings of the Advisory Council of the State of Virginia, April 21-June 19, 1861} (Richmond, VA: Virginia State Library, 1977), xiii.} Those who chose to enlist in existing militia companies may or may not have had the choice to elect officers. Most companies already had a full complement of officers (usually four, a captain and three lieutenants) although many older officers were forced to resign due to an inability to adjust their bodies to active military service and thus necessitated new elections.

The final option for enlistment was the Provisional Army of Virginia (distinct from the Provisional Army of the Confederacy which was the national army), created as a way to provide commissions for men who were not elected in the volunteer or militia forces.\footnote{For a detailed look at almost all aspects of Virginia military organization, see Lee A. Wallace, \textit{A Guide to Virginia Military Organizations, 1861-1865} (Richmond, VA: Virginia Civil War Commission, 1964).} It was never more than a paper tiger and consisted of only two units: the 1st Virginia Infantry Battalion and Captain Greenlee Davidson’s independent artillery battery. It mainly served as an outlet for Governor John Letcher to commission officers who may otherwise not have been elected to office.\footnote{James I. Robertson Jr., ed., \textit{Proceedings of the Advisory Council}, xviii-xix.} Thus, most Virginians chose to enlist as a federal volunteer in one of the emerging companies formed in April and May.
The experience of volunteer Charles Marshall Barton of Winchester offers an insight into the confusion prospective Virginia officers faced in the early months of the war. Family friend and Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, Colonel Francis H. Smith, procured Barton a commission as a First Lieutenant in the Provisional Army. Barton had simultaneously been elected Second Lieutenant, however, of a volunteer company he helped recruit. His orders as an officer of the Provisional Army required him to begin the recruiting process once more, this time by recruiting soldiers as members of the Provisional Army rather than a volunteer company. Unsure which commission he should accept, Barton wrote to Smith that he had “doubt whether I would not be more service in a volunteer company. Persons seem very reluctant, & in fact do not recruit at all, whereas at the same time they are rapidly filling up, & forming new volunteer companies.” Barton placed special emphasis on the fact that volunteer companies had no trouble finding recruits, whereas companies being formed for service in Virginia’s Provisional Army had much difficulty. Barton did not say why men seemed willing to join volunteer companies, however; the citizen soldier tradition in American military units most likely played a strong role. Since the Provisional Army was to be Virginia’s version of a standing state army, many men may have been hesitant to serve past the end of the war. Service in the regular army, especially as an enlisted man, was also considered a low profession only pursued by immigrants and the unskilled. A large number of men may have been loath to put their public respectability at risk.

55 Barton eventually chose the post of First Lieutenant and commenced recruiting duty around Winchester before his appointment as Lieutenant of the Jackson Light Artillery (a volunteer unit). He was killed in action May 25, 1862 at the Battle of First Winchester. Colt, Defend the Valley, 404.
56 The antebellum United States Army was composed of large numbers of Irish and German immigrants and so there was often a connotation made between unskilled immigrants and service in the US Army. Indeed, the lone battalion in Virginia’s Provisional Army was called the 1st Virginia (Irish) Battalion.
While not everyone had the enviable problem of being offered multiple commissions, other officers also encountered difficulties sorting out their ranks in the early months of the war. In 1859, John Newton Lyle, a twenty-one-year-old student at Washington College, formed a militia company composed of his fellow students in response to John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry. Yet, Lyle remembered that after the initial martial ardor wore off, the members of his company became disinterested in military affairs until the spring of 1861. During April of that year, Lyle and two other students were elected Captain, First Lieutenant, and Second Lieutenant respectively. However, the parents of the student-soldiers refused to consent to their enlistment if they were led by their own classmates. The parents insisted that at least some of the officers be professors from the college. Lyle agreed and wrote “they showed good sense in this, and we commissioned officers recognized it at once and called a meeting for reorganization.” At this new election, Lyle was elected Second Lieutenant and two professors elected Captain and First Lieutenant. Soon after, Lyle was elected First Lieutenant when the Captain resigned due to ill health.57 Lyle’s experience shows that early war company formations could be confusing when it came time to elect officers and that enlisted expectations, in this instance regarding officer appointments, were often misleading and unheeded.

Virginia Confederates who entered service in the spring of 1861 came to war with romantic expectations regarding their military service. Most soldiers believed the war would last but a few months and most likely culminate in one great battle to decide the fate of the new Confederacy. Spurred on by patriotic propaganda, early Virginia Confederates expected to fight a decisive battle, share in the glory of the aftermath of victory, and return home as victors amidst adulation and applause.

For the majority of soldiers, their military experience had been limited to militia service during the antebellum years, a service which could scarcely be called “military” at all. Antebellum militia companies functioned more as social organizations than a true defense against an enemy. Companies would gather at intervals throughout the year and hold musters. These musters attracted not just militia members but their families, friends, and whole communities who used militia muster days as a sort of public holiday. Speeches, banquets, dancing, horse and foot races, and other amusements were usually just as important as any military drilling which took place. Each company typically had a different and distinguishing uniform. The more elite and wealthy companies liberally trimmed their uniforms with gay colors such as gold, red, blue, and green, while less elite companies tried to keep pace. All in all, antebellum militia musters were public occasions of frivolity and as a result, many Virginia Confederates approached service in the Civil War with an attitude of romanticized military service based on their militia experience. Wayland Dunaway of the 47th Virginia Infantry remembered leaving for war “with no thought of captivity, wounds, nor death. Ignorant of war, we were advancing toward its devouring jaws with such conduct as became an excursion of pleasure.” Unfortunately, as Dunaway and other Virginia Confederates soon found out, military service resembled almost nothing like what they expected.

A captain’s ability to fulfill his soldier’s romantic ideals led to either his election or non-election in spring 1861. Prospective captains attempted to fulfill recruits glorified fantasies of military service with promises of certain weapons, uniforms, and service in a specific branch of service. Sometimes captains were wealthy enough to be able to afford to satisfy such promises.

from their own pockets; other captains had to use a variety of means to attempt to make good on their recruiting promises. Early war captains had to contend with severe weapons and equipage shortages, and captains resorted to numerous designs in order to arm their members. The Confederacy had no national system or infrastructure with which to arm its troops and so each state was responsible for arming its men. Virginia’s arsenal was so unprepared for war that on the day the convention voted to secede, it was necessary to appropriate $100,000 for Virginia’s defense. Virginia troops were able to capture weapons machinery from Harper’s Ferry Armory the day after secession which helped but it was private industry which supplied most of Virginia’s weapons during the war. Virginia factories quickly retooled their machines to begin producing weapons such as rifles and sabers and most of the $100,000 was spent on military contracts with private firms. The most prominent of these factories was Richmond’s Tredegar Ironworks (the largest ironworks in the Confederacy). Local gunsmiths and blacksmiths also became vital parts of Virginia’s war mobilization, as they both made new weapons and converted old flintlock muskets to percussion cap muskets.

Weapons and equipment availability become important for officer elections in spring 1861, since men often chose a company in which to enlist on the basis of its branch of service. There was also a “pecking order” to service branches that had been established by the U.S. Military Academy. Cavalry held the highest esteem among Virginians, but was also limited to those individuals who could afford to buy a war horse and procure a saber. Most companies

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61 William B. Edwards, Civil War Guns (Harrisburg, PA: The Stackpole Company, 1962), 375-378. By June 1861 the gun tooling machinery at Harper’s Ferry and Tredegar Ironworks were in operation manufacturing guns for Virginia. However, prior to those two facilities entering operation, Virginia issued troops 10,000 US-made flintlock muskets and 50,000 Virginia-made flintlock muskets, some dated as far back as the War of 1812.
62 Graduates of the US Military Academy were assigned to their branch of service based upon their class ranking at graduation. Engineering posts went to top graduates, artillery to the next highest ranked, and cavalry and infantry to those ranked nearer the bottom.
were able to provide sabers for their men but almost all Virginia cavalrymen were expected to provide their own horses. Since the hardships of war wore down horses quickly, a cavalryman needed access to, or the money to buy, multiple horses. Thus, cavalrymen typically came from wealthier and more elite backgrounds than did artillery and infantry enlistees. Artillery followed in prestige but cannon were hard to procure early in the war. Since the state first bought the cannon from private manufactures (such as Tredegar Ironworks) and then distributed the limited supply to artillery batteries, it was important for a prospective artillery company to have a captain with enough connections in government to be able to procure the necessary guns. An example of this will later be seen with Greenlee Davidson’s battery.

The most common type of company formed was infantry. Infantry captains were more easily able to obtain weapons for their men because rifles were both cheaper and easier to manufacture. Thus, only some volunteers’ enlistment decisions were based on personal preference, as socio-economic status influenced their abilities to equip themselves to the standards required by each branch. In the early months of the war Virginia had a difficult time equipping its troops in general and could only offer limited support to companies or batteries that needed weapons beyond small arms or equipage beyond the standard infantry accoutrements. The net result of this process was that these early cavalry and artillery companies tended to have higher concentrations of middle-and upper-class volunteers.

Volunteer Sgt. William Henry Morgan of Company C, 11th Virginia Infantry was typical of the soldier who enlisted with dashed expectations regarding his armament. Morgan and his comrades had been organized as a rifle company in Campbell County with the expectation they

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would be equipped with “Mississippi” Rifles. However, “soon after we arrived in Lynchburg it was learned that rifles could not be procured, the only arms being available old flint-lock muskets changed to percussion…We were much disappointed, and many of the men very much disgruntled…Other companies were in the same predicament, and many of the men threatened to disband and go home.” Thus, almost as soon as they entered service many Virginians had to modify their expectations regarding their equipment. For many soldiers a lack of modern arms was their first introduction to the reality of Confederate service.

Ultimately, Morgan’s company remained in service; however, the incident shows how important decent armament was to early Virginia Confederates. This desire emanated from the poor quality of the weapons the state arsenal sent enlistees in the early months of the war. Upon their enlistment in mid-May 1861, the members of the “Potomac Guards,” which became Company K of the 31st Virginia Infantry, were issued “rusted, useless muskets.” Twenty-year old Randolph-Macon student Giles B. Hale was elected captain of the Franklin Rangers (Company D, 2nd Virginia Cavalry) since he had “become somewhat schooled in cavalry tactics” when he drilled with a cavalry company in Mecklenburg before the war. While his company, “nearly every man [of which] was a boy,” may have felt confident in their captain’s martial abilities, their weapons failed to inspire the any confidence at all. Hale remembered the Governor “sent us a lot of flint-lock pistols, a lot of reap hooks, which he had the temerity to call sabres…ordered us to get all the shotguns we could and report at once to Lynchburg. Many of

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64 The Model 1841 “Mississippi” Rifle, so called because Jefferson Davis outfitted the Mississippi Volunteers with the weapon during the Mexican-American War, was a popular early rifle among Confederates. Since many Confederates were first issued smoothbore muskets, those who were issued a rifled weapon considered themselves quite fortunate.
our boys decided not to go unless we possessed ourselves of a bugle. A warehouse tin horn, ten feet long was substituted.” 67 The rest of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry was scarcely better off. Company A had been furnished with seventy-three sabres from the state but had only forty-five shotguns and forty pistols the men had brought from home. Company H from Appomattox had “old sabres in bad condition, 34 old Flintlock Pistols in bad condition & about worthless” while “some forty members have furnished themselves with double [barreled] shotguns,” according to Captain Joel Flood. To make matters even worse the company had to pay for their own tents which cost twenty-eight dollars apiece. 68

Under such conditions, some officers who vied for recruits in the spring of 1861 chose to arm their men from their own pockets. Eugene Davis’ company was one of the better equipped in the 2nd Virginia thanks to his largesse. Davis, a Charlottesville lawyer, bought his company thirty-six pistols prior to leaving for the front. 69 Twenty-four-year old Marion County native, Captain William Thompson of the 31st Virginia Infantry, bought his men 175 new muskets. His company must have stood out against Company D — the company from Gilmer County, which formed under Rev. John E. Mitchell, had no uniforms, or accoutrements when they enlisted in late June 1861. The best they could muster was forty-five hunting rifles. 70 While some captains were able to arm their men without relying on state aid, most companies were not so lucky. In such cases, companies were forced to turn to other means to supply their weapons.

Because the state could only provide limited material support in the early months of 1861, subscriptions circulated among the local citizenry helped to alleviate the financial burden.

68 Ibid, 10-12. Since the company only bought ten tents it is probable the tents were Sibley tents, large, conical tents capable of sleeping over twelve men. This means the men most likely pooled their money together to equip themselves.
69 Ibid, 8.
70 Ashcraft, 31st Virginia Infantry, 1-2.
for individual soldiers and aided in organizing companies quickly. The quicker a company organized, the quicker it was likely to be accepted into state service and not miss out on the glory of defending Virginia from invasion. Like Morgan, Pvt. John O. Casler of the 33rd Virginia Infantry left for war without being fully equipped. Casler noted that “we received our equipments from Springfield, as our company was equipped by private subscription, and they were not ready when we left. Our equipments consisted of knapsacks, blankets, cartridge boxes, canteens and tents.” Casler defined his “equipments” as almost all the essentials of soldiering. Thus, without the subscription raised to equip Casler and his compatriots they could scarcely have been considered ready for war. Although Captain Edward A. Goodwyn of the 13th Virginia Cavalry was a man of relatively modest means (he held the position of general ticket and freight agent for the South Side Railroad in Petersburg before the war), he was able to help raise between eight and nine thousand dollars from the citizens of Petersburg to provide horses for the cavalry company he organized.

Lynchburg’s citizens were especially generous with their money. Lynchburg resident William M. Blackford wrote to his son Launcelot “Lanty” Blackford, a student at the University of Virginia, just a few days after Virginia’s secession and was proud to report that “the citizens [of Lynchburg] now have subscribed $20,000 and put the companies on a war footing. I saw the list just now. 16 men gave $500 apiece.” Since $8,000 was raised by just sixteen people it is likely those sixteen had a voice in the choice of Captain. Historian Steven Tripp argued that in antebellum Lynchburg elites would often buy their men meals during militia drills and pay for

73 William H. Blackford Letter, 1861 April 20, UVA.
their clothing with the expectation of election to office and social deference. It is not a leap to conclude that the sixteen men who donated $500 each would have expected the same deference shown just months earlier to be shown again; this time either by being elected themselves or having men of their choice elected.

Sometimes citizens who paid for equipage became directly involved in the selecting of officers, which may or may not have bypassed the democratic tradition of officer election. First Lieutenant John Newton Lyle of the 4th Virginia Infantry had gone briefly to Fairfield (likely in Rockbridge County) to help drill a company that was organizing there. Presumably, Lyle performed satisfactorily as a drill master since the McDowell sisters, who not only paid to equip the company but also named it the McDowell Guards in honor of their father (James McDowell, a former Governor of Virginia), offered Lyle the captaincy. Lyle turned down this offer; however, his experience is telling since, in an atmosphere of liberty, democracy, and autonomy, the sisters “offered” Lyle the position. The situation is made more intriguing because the citizens in this case were women—the McDowell sisters—making the situation even more complex in a patriarchal society. Lyle’s episode plays host to a variety of interpretations. It was quite possibly with the complete concurrence of the McDowell Guards that the sisters “offered” Lyle the captaincy. However, the sisters may also have been unattuned to the democratic tradition of electing one’s officers, though this seems unlikely. It may have been that the sisters felt it was their right, whatever the democratic traditions, to appoint the captain of the company they paid to outfit; however, one cannot see eighty or so male soldiers being dictated to by two sisters no matter the amount of money put forth. This shows that although the sisters probably

74 Steven Elliott Tripp, Yankee Town, Southern City, 83.
did not simply “appoint” the captain of the McDowell Guards, they had influence in the choice of its captain.

While wealthy persons who paid to equip a company often expected a say in its officers, some men offered to equip a company with their own funds and anticipated the captaincy in return. The captaincy did not come without terms, however, since enlisted troops often expected their captain to use his own money for their well-being. As far back at least as the 1830s there was an expectation for many militia captains to pay for their soldier’s necessities if there was a lack of funding from the state. In the early months of 1861, Virginia newspapers were full of advertisements from clothing manufacturers exhorting prospective captains to purchase everything from pants to shirts to holsters for their companies. An advertisement in the Petersburg Daily Express for fatigue caps at $1.50 each was targeted directly at “Captains of Companies of Volunteers now formed or forming.” Since the cost to uniform a company of eighty men with caps would have cost a captain $120, it was necessary for the captain to have access to private donors willing to foot the bill, be able to pay the bill himself, or effectively canvas the community to raise a subscription. Thus, men would have chosen their captain and their respective companies in part based on the captain’s willingness and ability to provide materially for his men.

Examples of such captains can be found in early war Petersburg companies. Henry Clay Pate, a noted secessionist and wealthy attorney who claimed to have been a former border ruffian, organized a cavalry company and lured recruits with “promises of free uniforms and

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77 Petersburg Daily Express, June 20, 1861.
horses” which he paid for from his own pocket. The men of the Petersburg Cavalry elected Christopher Fry Fisher, a banker with over $55,000 in real and personal property in 1860, as their captain. While there is no evidence he did so, he certainly could have afforded to equip his men from his own purse had he wished. He was also someone who would have been a familiar face in the community as many of the men in his cavalry company may have visited his bank for loans and deposits. Pate, whose secessionist politics had been considered blasphemy just months earlier in heavily Unionist Petersburg, was able to make good his promise to pay for his men’s horses and uniforms and even traveled to Norfolk to salvage small arms that fleeing Union troops had dumped into the river there. However, he was unable to secure sabers and pistols for his men despite his attempt to influence state officials to supply him with the needed weapons. While Pate formed his own company, and was subsequently elected, Fry was elected captain of an established militia company. In both cases, however, there was a desire to serve under a captain with enough wealth (or ingenuity in Pate’s case) to supply his company with the needed instruments of war.

Even in 1862, when the Confederate government provided enlisted soldiers with equipment, uniforms, and provisions, some prospective officers still used monetary inducements to recruit men. Captain Greenlee Davidson was authorized by Virginia Governor John Letcher to raise an artillery battery in February 1862. Davidson, a native of Lexington and graduate of Washington College, was lucky to have Letcher, a family friend, in his corner. There was a general dearth of artillery pieces in Virginia at the time yet Letcher made sure Davidson received the last five guns from the state arsenal. Davidson was not unaware of this benefit and wrote his

78 Greene, Civil War Petersburg, 43.
79 Ibid.; 1860 US Census, Revenue District 2, Dinwiddie, Virginia, Roll M653_1342, p. 120, image 124, Family History Library Film: 805342.
80 Greene, Civil War Petersburg, 43.
father on February 10, 1862 that, “I shall commence recruiting in the morning and you will see my advertisements in the papers of Wednesday. Having a battery ready for the field will secure me a Company in a very short time. The Artillery is the most popular branch of the service, and a majority of our Infantry soldiers are anxious to go into it.”

Similar to the early months of the war, when many soldiers were prevented from enlisting in a certain branch of service because of a lack of funds or personal equipment, in 1862 the Confederate government still could not provide certain equipment or weapons and cavalryman were still required to furnish their own horses.

Although by 1862 Virginia was able to provide soldiers with uniforms, weapons, and other necessities, officers still had to rely on their own funds to make sure their companies were ready to take the field. Davidson estimated it would cost him $1000 to fully organize his company but also noted that a “considerable portion of my expenditures will be refunded.” What exactly the expenditures were that Davidson had to pay from his own pocket is unclear. He wrote about opening a recruiting office in Richmond and putting advertisements in local newspapers; he asked his father to recruit for him in his home county of Rockbridge and requested that any recruits his father found be provided transportation to Richmond. It is likely these, as well as other minor expenses came from Davidson’s private purse rather than the Confederate governments. Davidson’s efforts paid off as he wrote a month later that his

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82 During the Civil War, each state rather than the central Confederate government was responsible for supplying troops with clothing.
83 Davidson, *Captain Greenlee Davidson, C.S.A.*, 34-35.
84 Ibid.
company numbered 150 men, and he had increased his battery to six guns but that all the effort had him “worked almost to death.”

A shrinking pool of manpower in 1862 meant that prospective captains needed to continue to offer inducements to recruits to fill company rosters. In addition to incurring costs for advertisements and providing recruits with transportation, Davidson found it necessary to pay his recruits a $50 bounty in addition to the government issued bounty of $50. Davidson asked his father in Rockbridge to “employ me about eight or ten more drivers and ten or fifteen privates.” Thus, Davidson was requesting his father to pay at least $900 and as much as $1250 in order to fill his company. In the initial enlistment rush in 1861 there were occasional bounties promised to troops but most Virginia soldiers enlisted without one. However, the Conscription Act of 1862 provided that re-enlisting soldiers, as well as men volunteering for the first time, were entitled to an enlistment bonus of $50. Still, Davidson found it necessary to pay an additional $50 in order to fill out his battery.

Davidson’s experience in 1862 shows that, just as in the first few months of the war, prospective captains needed to be wealthy enough to provide inducements to recruits themselves or have the ability to raise the funds from other sources. Davidson used his connections with Governor Letcher to gain access to the last artillery pieces available and then used his own and his father’s money to organize and fill his company. Davidson may have been overly confident in his belief that having a full battery of guns would make recruitment easy, but his belief was well founded. Based on the experience of enlistment patterns in spring 1861, when having uniforms and weapons available to equip a new company usually guaranteed a prospective

85 Ibid, 36.
86 Ibid.
87 The Conscription Act made all males aged 18-35 eligible to be conscripted for army service unless their occupation was deemed essential to the war effort.
captain a full company of men in a matter of weeks if not days, Davidson had every reason to expect similar results in the spring of 1862. The procurement of weapons was much easier in spring 1862 and Davidson was mistaken in his belief that he received the last artillery pieces the Confederacy had at its disposal. There were at least four other artillery batteries formed in Richmond in spring 1862 and at least one, the Crenshaw Battery, had a captain who “advanced the necessary funds to the Confederate government for the purchase of horses and guns.”

While artillery pieces were harder to obtain than small arms, they were by no means impossible to get and a recruit in Richmond during the spring of 1862 had multiple batteries to enlist in (this does not take into account possible enlistment in an existing battery). As a result, the nature of recruitment and enlisted expectations of officers were different in many respects in spring 1862 than they were in spring 1861. A prospective captain still needed to draw on his own funds in order to successfully recruit, however, those funds were used differently in 1862.

Just as in 1861, prospective and now current captains still found it necessary to spend their own money to clothe their companies in 1862. Robert N. Neblett, a captain in the 9th Virginia Infantry, did not have the funds to uniform his company himself, so he planned to go to “May court…[and] apply to the court to give me money enough to uniform one hundred men.”

Even though Neblett himself apparently did not have or was unwilling to use his own money to uniform his company, he had enough influence in the local courts to persuade the county to pay for his men’s uniforms. It is unclear whether or not he was successful. Neblett wrote his father in mid-June that his company was fully uniformed and he was sending his father a statement for

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89 Robert N. Neblett letter to father, 2 April 1862, Neblett Family Papers, Section 1: Mss1 N2795a 1-245, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. (Hereafter cited as VHS).
the cost incurred. What is unclear is whether he used his own money and was billing the county or billing his father. Regardless, that Neblett was successful in providing uniforms for his men is clear. In a letter to his father, Captain James Read Branch of Company K, 16th Virginia Infantry (soon to be Branch’s Light Artillery Battery), exposed his men’s expectation that he would provide their clothing. Branch was also presumably contemplating his company’s conversion to an artillery battery from an infantry company but noted “it is doubtful about getting the field pieces.” Branch’s men placed certain expectations on him during the early months of 1862; they expected Branch to clothe them as well as obtain a change in branch of service. The need for an officer to have wealth or access to wealth in order to provide clothing for his men was one facet of soldier life that remained unchanged for officers as the war moved into its second spring.

When companies formed in the early months of the war the men who formed them were aware of their own standing in society as well as the social makeup of the company they chose. These men, especially those who considered themselves “gentlemen,” chose their company according to its social composition. Some companies were formed from contingents of college students such as Liberty Hall Volunteers (Company I, 4th Virginia Infantry) from Washington College. Others formed from pre-existing antebellum social groups such as a company from Georgia that marched through Petersburg in 1861 which was formed from members of the “Sons of Temperance,” an anti-alcohol society. Determining elite attitudes toward service in the ranks as well as what elite soldiers believed were desirable traits in an officer, helps to better understand what common soldiers believed were desirable traits as well. High officer turnover

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90 Robert N. Neblett letter to father 18 June 1862, VHS.
91 James Read Branch letter to Thomas Branch, 15 February 1862, James Read Branch Papers, Mss 2 B7325 b, VHS.
92 *Petersburg Daily Express*, August 5, 1861.
indicates, as historian Steven Elliot Tripp maintained, that common soldiers were disappointed in elite officer’s behaviors early in the war. This disappointment led to those officers’ failure to be elected after the first few months of the war.

The social demographic in a company often determined its dominant principles and outlook. In the same way that certain individuals chose which company to enlist in based on its social make-up, the social composition of a given company influenced its election of officers. Elite men held different views on honor, conduct, and dignity than did poorer whites, and those distinctions were borne out in officer elections. William Poague remembered that “the very best young men in the state flocked to the company” and Poague believed those early enlists helped attract others of a similar social background to the company. This pattern continued at least through 1861. “Lanty” Blackford wrote home that about every four or five days the Rockbridge Artillery received a new recruit who was “of the better class, generally [a] gentleman,” and these men usually came from across Virginia, not just from Rockbridge. According to Poague and Blackford these men came from far and wide in order to serve with men of like social standing. Blackford also wrote home that he would only re-enlist in a company that could provide the same social companionship that the Rockbridge Artillery gave him. His sentiments were also affected by an unwillingness to serve as a private with members beneath his antebellum social standing, “I can stand it being a private very well, but I cannot stand, and will not if I can help it, being in an indiscriminate crowd…I cannot and will not make companions of such.” Members of the Richmond Howitzers felt similar to Blackford regarding the companionship and social company they received (it will be remembered the Howitzers voted members into the company

93 Poague, Gunner with Stonewall, 2.
94 “Lanty” Blackford letter to father, 21 November 1861, UVA.
95 “Lanty” Blackford letter to father, 10 December 1861, UVA.
during the early months of the war). Private John Van Lew McCreery of the Richmond Howitzers recounted that the company contained “some of the best and most influential citizens of Richmond.” First Lieutenant Robert Stiles, also of the Richmond Howitzers, remembered the company much as McCreery did. Stiles noted that the Richmond Howitzers had a vibrant intellectual culture, going so far as to form a Glee Club and Law Club which held mock trials. It was partly the composition of the company which fostered this environment. Stiles wrote that “the composition…[was] made up largely of young business men and clerks from the city of Richmond, but included also a number of country boys, for the most part of excellent families, with a very considerable infusion of college-bred men.” Men such as Poague, McCreery, and Stiles chose their companies in part based on the social demographic of which they were composed. On the opposite side of the social spectrum, officers who came from less elite social backgrounds more easily interacted with their men. While such officers may not have brought the same amount of wealth or ability to provide materially for their men as did elite officers, poorer men better understand how to connect with their men. Captain French Harding of the 31st Virginia remembered that his election “made very little difference in our relations.”

Many men who considered themselves “gentleman” felt quite magnanimous for serving in the ranks as enlisted soldiers. This is perhaps in part due to antebellum concepts of militia service. Before the war, it was poorer whites who were subject to fines for missing militia musters while the richer, more well-connected members of society could garner a commission and the prestige that came with it, and then resign with honor and avoid paying any fines. Thus,

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96 The Richmond Howitzers were organized by George Wythe Randolph (a grandson of Thomas Jefferson) on 9 November 1859, a few weeks prior to John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry. At the beginning of the war, as applications for membership rose, the battery expanded into three batteries and formed a battalion.
97 John Van Lew McCreery, First Co. of Richmond Howitzers, Mss 7:4 R4146:1, VHS.
99 Harding, Civil War Memoirs, 33.
when the war began, if elites were denied commissions, they felt very noble by stooping to serve in the ranks.

   Early war and post-war accounts are full of references to noble, magnanimous privates from wealthy or prominent backgrounds. McCreery remembered particularly that “learned jurists, journalists…merchants served as its privates.”

   Twenty-year old William Thomas Morgan was defeated for office in the Petersburg Volunteer Cockade Cadets and felt it necessary to send an open letter to the company in which he stated “I was defeated, but did not think myself to good to fight for my country.”

   Frank Jones, adjutant to Brigadier General J.H. Carson in April 1861, wrote his wife Susan in that “the gentlemen here in the ranks, I say *gentlemen* are working at the lowest & hardest kind of service there is but *one heart & one mind is devoted to one great cause.*” Carlton McCarthy was thirteen when the war began (he later enlisted in the 2nd Richmond Howitzers) and remembered that “to offer a man promotion in the early part of the war was equivalent to an insult. The higher the social position, the greater the wealth, the more patriotic it would be to serve in the humble position of a private.”

   Judith Brockenbrough McGuire, a wealthy aristocrat from Alexandria wrote in her diary in mid-June 1861 that “the truth is, the elite of the land is in the ranks.” She wrote of hearing a story about a wealthy private who was made to clean his captain’s shoes but made light of the situation. She also heard a private mention that his captain was “perhaps the plainest man, socially, in the company, but that he was an admirable officer.”

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100 McCreery, 1st Co. Richmond Howitzers, Virginia Historical Society.
101 William Thomas Morgan letter, 28 July 1861, Accession # 41962, Personal Papers Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. (Hereafter cited as LVA).
102 Frank Jones letter to Susan Jones, 23 April 1861 in Colt, Defend the Valley, 61.
103 Carlton McCarthy, *Detailed Minutiae of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia 1861-1865* (Richmond: B.F. Johnson Company, 1899), 29. While much of McCarthy’s work is a standard Lost Cause document and contains multiple inaccuracies, his words here reflect what other primary source material reflects.
some elite men serving in the ranks were able to put aside class privilege for the greater good, even if they tended to believe they were nobler, more principled men than those who did not. This elite nobility did not extend to yeoman or poorer whites, however, since these men were expected by Southern elites to serve in the ranks as enlisted soldiers.

While some elite men served in the ranks and performed enlisted duty without complaint (even though there was a large amount of patting their own backs), other socially prominent men chafed at being forced to serve in the ranks. Private Robert G.H. Kean of the 11th Virginia Infantry wrote to “Lanty” Blackford in May 1861 that “when the first call to arms was made, it was the imperative duty of every man, whatever his pretensions social and intellectual, who was acquainted with tactics” to serve either as an officer or in the ranks. Kean now felt, however, that if someone could be engaged in a productive activity outside of the military he had a higher duty to serve in that productive capacity.105 For Kean, the high sense of military duty had only lasted about one month before he decided his position, both socially and intellectually, entitled him to serve in a capacity outside of the military. His correspondent, “Lanty” Blackford also resented being asked to perform what he considered menial tasks. Even though he considered such tasks as “ennobling” and “commendable” when done by those who could not afford a servant or slave, he and his messmates decided that rather than engage in such ennobling activities themselves they would hire a servant.106 Men such as Kean and Blackford who could use their position as an “essential” worker or could afford to hire a camp servant or bring a slave could not have failed to rub more common, poorer soldiers the wrong way, especially since they were of comparative rank. In the same way that various exemptions for service in the Conscription Act (especially the Twenty-Slave Clause) angered many southern soldiers, Kean’s

105 R.G.H. Kean letter to “Lanty” Blackford, May 1861, UVA.
106 “Lanty” Blackford letter to mother, 20 September 1861, UVA.
attempt to wiggle out of active service before a major battle had been fought shows that some elites cared little for how others perceived their actions.107

In juxtaposition to elites who willing served as privates, other elites held the opinion that their superior education or wealth either entitled them to high military office or exempted them from service in the ranks. These elites often eschewed running in company level elections and attempted to use personal connections to gain a commission. The sister of James Kemper, the Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, wrote Kemper about his nephew and stated, “I will be very grateful to you, to use your influence to have him promoted, I am certain he is entitled to a more honorable place than a mere private.”108 Hugh Sheffey, a friend of John H. McCue, wrote to Robert E. Lee on McCue’s behalf to ask for a commission. Sheffey admitted that McCue had no military experience but felt that his qualifications “as a gentleman, a man of honor and intellect, and of…chivalric courage,” made him a good candidate for a commission.109 In both cases, nepotism and connections paved the way for a commission. Frederick Freeman, Kemper’s nephew, ultimately gained a commission in the Signal Corps, and John H. McCue was appointed as captain and regimental commissary of the 51st Virginia Infantry.110

Regardless of how wealthy or prominent an officer was, in the early months of 1861 there was a high chance he had no more idea about how to manage a company of troops than did the private in the ranks. Many officers and enlisted men acknowledged both during the war and

107 In October 1862, Confederate Congress passed a second conscription act which expanded the number of exemptions for conscription. The most controversial exemption was for planters who owned twenty or more slaves.
108 Mary A. Freeman to James L. Kemper, 28 May 1861, James L. Kemper Papers, MSS 4098, Box 3, UVA.
109 Hugh Sheffey to R.E. Lee, 28 April 1861, McCue Family Papers, MSS 4406, UVA. McCue’s letter was also endorsed by Samuel Garland, Roger A. Pryor, and John D. Imboden, all three of whom would become Confederate generals.
after in their memoirs that they had no military experience whatsoever. Sgt. William Henry Morgan took a certain amount of pride in his officer’s lack of military acumen; “None of the officers or men had any military education, but little training in drilling and none in camp life, and were all, officers and men, quite green and inexperienced in military affairs generally. But we all knew how to handle guns and shoot straight.” One wonders how Morgan’s bravado changed after his first experience in battle; yet, clearly Morgan did not have any problem being led by officers with no military training. Others, however, were more cautious in their election of officers. First Lieutenant and later Captain French Harding of the 31st Virginia Infantry recollected that “some of the boys refused office on account of their inexperience in war matters.” Artillerist William Poague unsuccessfully tried to decline his officer bars “simply because I was not qualified for it. Afterwards I keenly felt my deficiencies. With a military training, I would have been more useful in the service.” Similar to Poague, who turned into one of Lee’s best artillers, John S. Mosby, who became a celebrated partisan and cavalry leader in Northern Virginia, also had misgivings about being an officer due to his lack of military training, preferring instead to serve as a private “under a good officer.” Happily for Civil War enlistees, there was a fair number of men with antebellum military service capable of leading them.

Even though some officers may have had militia service and believed themselves educated in military affairs, pre-war military service differed in context and content between the militia and the Regular Army. Civil War soldiers recognized the difference between professional soldiers, volunteers who had seen combat, and militia officers whose main duty was to provide

111 Morgan, Personal Reminiscences of the War, 25.
112 Harding, Civil War Memoirs, 1.
113 Poague, Gunner with Stonewall, 2.
food on muster days. While Poague and Mosby recognized their inadequacy as officers, others recognized their own abilities based on combat service. In his 1896 memoir, John O. Casler of the 33rd Virginia Infantry included a post-war letter written by his former Colonel Arthur C. Cummings. Cummings wrote that “from my experience as Captain in the Mexican war I found that the greatest service I could render the men under my command was to see they were well taken care of and provided for as circumstances would permit.”

Enlisted men also recognized they could learn much from officers with professional military backgrounds. John Mosby remembered that since his commanding officer, William “Grumble” Jones, “had been an officer in the army on the plains, we learned a good deal from him in the two weeks on the road, and it was a good course of discipline for us.” William T. Poague felt that he and his comrades also acknowledged the benefit of having a professional officer lead them. Poague believed his artillery company was “attracted, I think, by the fact that a West Point graduate, the Reverend William N. Pendleton, was our captain in the early days of the war. Those brought by his influence afterwards induced others of the same character to join us.” Thus, in Poague’s mind, Pendleton not only gave his men the benefit of his professional experience but also helped to attract the sort of men who would make good soldiers.

Others were not so quick to recognize the ability of military educated officers. Men thought that Regular Army officers were martinets or disciplinarians and were more apt to take away the independence of volunteers quicker than citizen-officers were. Additionally, Regular Army officers were viewed as lazy and entitled. Many shared the opinion of Captain Thomas Carter of the King William Artillery. Carter believed Regular Army officers were “inferior to

115 Arthur C. Cummings to John O. Casler, 10 November 1896 in Casler, *Four Years in the Stonewall Brigade*, 34-35.
great men in other professions. They lead an idle life, are paid a stated salary, are promoted in regular order & therefore have no incentive to exertion in time of peace.”  

John Worsham of “F” Company of the 21st Virginia felt General William Loring, the youngest Colonel in the pre-war US Army, unfairly disparaged him and his comrades. While passing Worsham and his company on the march in late July 1861 Loring remarked “they were a fine looking body of men, but no soldiers. Until they are able to sleep in winter amidst the snow and ice without tents, they are not soldiers! This was repeated to our company, and the men were very indignant, and put him down at once as an officer who knew nothing.” Worsham and his comrades were clearly not properly armed with the facts about Loring. At the age of fourteen Loring left his home to fight in the Second Seminole War for five years, emerging with a lieutenant’s commission. He was commissioned directly into the US Army as a Captain of Mounted Rifles in 1847 and lost an arm storming “the halls of Montezuma” in Mexico, yet remained on active duty. Loring then led a 2,500 mile-march from Missouri to Oregon before fighting Apaches in New Mexico. In light of further campaigning, Worsham noted only a few months passed before he and his fellow rebels came to believe in Loring’s assessment. Scoffers such as Worsham usually learned their folly the hard way, by living through hardships in camp, on the march, and in battle.

Enlisted troops quickly came to realize the importance of drilling under a good officer. Most officers were conscious of their shortcomings and attempted to rectify them by reading military manuals such as Hardee’s Tactics or Col. J. Lucius Davis’ Trooper’s Manual for use by

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120 John Worsham, One of Jackson’s Foot Cavalry (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1912), 41.
121 Peter Cozzens, Shenandoah 1862: Stonewall Jackson’s Valley Campaign (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 54-55.
cavalrymen. These manuals informed them how to drill their men and educated them on proper battlefield tactics. In the early months of the war Confederate officers would have also relied on the 1857 *Regulations for the Army of the United States* to help aid in camp layout, care of weapons, interactions with sutlers, and everything else an officer needed to know to run his regiment or company.

Because drill manuals required a modicum of literacy, officers and prospective officers had to be able to read if they were to be effective in their positions. This was never more important than during the early months of the war when many companies had yet to be organized into regiments and relied almost solely on the expertise of its company grade officers to learn military drill. For example, in his recent work, historian Earl J. Hess recounted a Mississippi captain who used a fence rail to line his men up straight and then began using Hardee’s manual to drill them. Men who were less literate and less educated were thus placed at a disadvantage when it came to running for military office.

While officers may have read from the same manual, company grade officers’ duties in camp and on the battlefield, were different among ranks. Similar to today’s military, the captain of a Civil War company was ultimately responsible for everything that happened in his company. However, also like today’s military, captains were mostly bogged down with

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122 In 1855, William J. Hardee, then a Major in the US Army, published *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of Troops When Acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen*. J. Lucius Davis (USMA 1833) published *The Trooper’s Manual: or, Tactics for light dragoons and mounted riflemen* (Richmond, VA: A. Morris, 1861). Davis served as Colonel of the 10th Virginia Cavalry during the war.
123 Sutlers were authorized camp merchants who followed armies and sold their goods to soldiers.
125 My research has found that Virginia Confederate’s did not just elect the three officer ranks that regulations prescribed (captain, first and second lieutenant). Virginian’s elected captains, junior and junior first and second lieutenants, third and fourth lieutenants, and even Brevet lieutenants. Not every unit elected every one of these sub-ranks, however; most units elected at least four officers: captain, first lieutenant, and second lieutenant and usually one other rank from the list above.
paperwork and delegated the daily operations of the company to his lieutenants. The lieutenants drilled the company, conducted inspections, and generally made sure the enlisted men were taken care of. As Earl J. Hess has shown, there was little change since the Mexican-American War in how troops were deployed during combat. The linear tactical system used by Civil War soldiers required officers to have at least a modicum of technical acumen to be able to execute drill maneuvers properly. Effective officers recognized that their own mastery of the drill manual was contingent upon their own dedication to study, especially since an officer’s drill proficiency built a trust between him and the soldiers under his command. Soldiers needed to trust that their officer would give the appropriate order for each situation and likewise, an officer needed to trust his men to execute that order promptly and efficiently.

Before soldiers such as John Worsham came to realize the difference between capable and incapable officers, and before most had a chance to view their officers on the drill and parade grounds, soldiers in the spring and early summer of 1861 had already elected their officers. Because of the haste with which men elected their officers in the early months, demonstrated skill was not relevant to early officer elections. More important than personality or military acumen was a captain’s ability to provide arms and uniforms. Elections in 1862 differed both in the context of the war but also because soldiers have had a year to evaluate their officer’s efficacy in camp, on the march, and to a lesser degree, on the battlefield.

A variety of methods were used to elect officers, one of which was voice vote or *viva voce*. William Pogue remembered that the initial elections for the Rockbridge Artillery was done by voice vote. The Petersburg Light Dragoons, which later became Company B of the 13th

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Virginia Cavalry, published a set of by-laws in 1859 which stated that the election of officers was “viva voce from among the members of the Troop without regard to rank.” This method was similar to how Virginia localities voted in political elections and would have posed no special problem for Virginia’s soldiers. However, it did mean that peer pressure could have an enormous impact on a soldier’s vote. During antebellum elections, heads of household often dictated younger males’ votes as did peer pressure from friends and other citizens. Thus, officer elections held under voice vote were more apt to be influenced by group decision than were elections that were less public.

While many companies followed the traditional method of voice voting others used less transparent methods. The elite Richmond Howitzers expanded from a single battery to a three-battery battalion in June 1861 and voted on potential members using white and black balls until they “took the field.” Robert Hubard of the 3rd Virginia Cavalry wrote that “2nd Lieutenant Perkins was chosen captain by ballot,” although whether this was a paper ballot or ball ballot is not clear. Sometimes a regiment’s colonel decided the method of election. Benjamin Lewis Blackford, in camp at Manassas, wrote home to his mother in Lynchburg that “Col. [Samuel] Garland…gave his orders -yesterday concerning the way in which the vote is to be taken on the 24th of this month.” Perhaps the most unusual method of election occurred in the Black Walnut Dragoons of Halifax County. Thomas H. Owen and William H. Easley, both graduates of the Virginia Military Institute, challenged each other to a fencing match to decide the

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130 By-Laws of the Petersburg Light Dragoons, LVA.
131 Crofts, Old Southampton, 51. Also see Tripp, Yankee Town, Southern City, 37.
133 McCreery, First Co. of Richmond Howitzers, VHS.
captaincy. After disarming Owen, Easley was duly installed as captain and Owen as first lieutenant. Such a method was certainly unusual for deciding Civil War officer elections but not necessarily for determining who stood atop elite male power structures. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown argued that in the antebellum period, “duels were a method for ascertaining who should exercise the power that the community of men was willing to accord the winners.” While most candidates simply had to brave a public rejection rather than a sword blade, public rejection could cut just as deeply.

Elections during the first few months of the war were less fraught and apt to cause hurt feelings and acrimony within companies than those after the summer of 1861. This was due in part to a belief among almost all early recruits that the war would last but a few months and so younger elites were more willing to let their older social counterparts hold office out of respect. Early elections almost exclusively ran candidates from the same elite social background and so men felt little shame in losing to someone they considered a social equal. Age and generational differences also played a role in increasing the volatility of elections. While there were certainly a large number of younger men elected to office in the early months of 1861, soldiers by and large chose older men to lead them. This was because it was mostly older men who had previous military experience as officers, held prominent positions in antebellum life, and had accumulated enough wealth to be able to outfit a company.

As these older men were either promoted, resigned, or were forced out of office, younger elites began to contest company elections. Historian Stephen Berry argued that older southerners had a “real anxiety was that southern children were not growing up at all, creating a generation of perpetual infants, incapable of controlling their urges” and that young elites were “constantly

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on their guard, watching each other for signs of respect and disrespect, competing with each other for mates, honor, and distinctions.”137 For their part, many younger elites carried a belief grown in the antebellum period that older Virginian’s were responsible for a lack of professional opportunities and stood in the way of economic progress.138 Thus, pre-existing generational conflict played a role in the bitterness of officer elections that occurred post-First Manassas.

A second reason elections became more explosive as the war dragged on through the summer of 1861 was that men from less prominent backgrounds began to run for office which caused resentment and embarrassment for elite losers of elections. Historian Amy R. Minton wrote that not long after the war got underway, the Richmond Daily Dispatch, one of the city’s leading newspapers, noted that “social relations had already changed in…Richmond” and that “the old landmarks of etiquette and social life have been wiped out by war.”139 The social upheaval which affected Richmond’s citizens also affected officer elections. Since military titles had long been a measure of a man’s standing in the community, many lower-class whites took the opportunity provided by the war to try and elevate their social standing.140 Many men in antebellum Virginia had benefitted from the state’s economic boom during the 1850s and had the wealth but not the “identification of moral worth by blood and name” that historian Bertram-Wyatt Brown argued differentiated class and wealth.141 Many non-elite white men used elections as a way to confirm their ascendency into elite status since as historian J. Dickinson Bruce pointed out, “officerships confirmed rather than conferred status on the holder.”142 As

137 Berry, All That Makes A Man, 37, 39.
138 Peter Carmichael, The Last Generation, 41.
141 Wyatt- Brown, Southern Honor, 121.
142 Dickson D. Bruce, Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1979), 168.
non-elitism men began to challenge the rapidly changing status quo, elite men, particularly younger elite men, became increasingly resentful at what they perceived as an affront to their social status.

A final reason elections in the early months were less likely to cause bitterness among participants was due to the relative lack of politicking among the candidates. Historian Steven Tripp posited that elites in Lynchburg maintained the social order in elections by keeping divisive partisanship out of local elections. Although elites may have belonged to different parties, their status as elite’s trumped politics and their desire to maintain their closed ranks led them to control the “process from nomination to election,” so that “by the time the general population became active participants in the political process, political leaders had already scripted their role.” 143 Thus, when voters arrived at the polls, they were able to vote for a party line ticket according to their preferences without too much politicking having taken place throughout the process. Elite gentlemen expected such a process to continue in officer elections but were shocked by the politicking they encountered from less scrupulous men in elections held after the summer of 1862 as we shall see. Their shock in many cases turned to anger towards men who campaigned in a manner they deemed unfair and ungentlemanly, resulting in bitter outcomes for participants.

When elites ran against other elites there was less ill will than when non-elites were involved in elections. William Poague and his competitors, James C. Davis and John B. Craig, were elite men who engaged in a gentlemanly election in which “Davis voted for Craig and I voted for Davis.” 144 All three men were elected to positions and although Craig was described by Poague as a “noted bully and street fighter,” all three participated in what constituted a

143 Tripp, *Southern City, Yankee Town*, 36-37.
gentlemanly election process. Bully and rogue he may have been, Craig nevertheless showed his willingness not to subvert traditional conceptions on how elections should be held. Robert Lemmon, a Marylander serving in the 21st Virginia Infantry, wrote to his mother in late May 1861 regarding his own prospects for election. Lemmon wrote, “I was a prominent candidate. Defeated, of course, owing & properly, too, to the fact that I am a recruit- I am hardly disappointed, tho I would have been much gratified at receiving the office. I was backed by all the commd. officers. The men are very fair.” Lemmon was able to maintain his pride in the knowledge that it was his age and inexperience that cost him the election rather than a defeat at the hands of a lower-class man who had subverted the traditional social roles.

Elections that resulted in wounded pride and hurt feelings, such as the one Randolph Fairfax described to “Lanty” Blackford, became more typical after First Manassas. Fairfax wrote “we have elected 2nd Lieut., McLaughlin, to take his place [Col. Pendleton]. Most of the fellows seem to think that McLaughlin will make a very good Captain… The vote on election was almost unanimous, and Brockenbrough, the 1st Lieut, in consequence has resigned his commission and left us.” Lieutenant John Brockenbrough was a pre-war lawyer with degrees from the University of Virginia and Washington College and was wounded in the face at First Manassas. His level of education, as well as the fact he shed blood at First Manassas, could only have deepened the insult of being passed over for the captaincy. McLaughlin, who the battery saw fit to promote over Brockenbrough, was also a lawyer and a graduate of Washington College so there may also have been a pre-existing professional rivalry between the two.

Regardless, unlike Robert Lemmon who displayed no resentment at his non-election, and unlike

145 Ibid.
146 Robert Lemmon letter, 21 May 1861, in Ruffner, Maryland’s Blue and Gray, 80.
147 Randolph Fairfax letter to L.M. Blackford, 17 August 1861, UVA.
Poague, Mosby, and others who acknowledged their deficiencies as soldiers during the early months of the war, the election to replace Captain Pendleton was filled with resentment and egoism that led to the battery to elect a new captain but also a new first lieutenant.

The Cumberland Light Dragoons of the 3rd Virginia Cavalry also held an election in which wounded pride catalyzed unexpected officer turnover. Private (later Lieutenant) Robert T. Hubard Jr., recounted that in August 1861 “2nd Lieutenant Perkins was chosen captain by ballot [Captain Henry Johnson resigned due to ill health]. Whereupon Lieutenant Willson, feeling his honor wounded, resigned his commission. He was a dashing officer, but a man of very little capacity.” Thus, another instance of wounded pride resulted in the company not only having to elect a new captain but also a new first lieutenant.

The truth may be somewhat different as it would be unfair to simply chalk Willson’s resignation up to petulant pride. Willson was urged by Benjamin Allen, the company’s current second lieutenant to resign his position as First Lieutenant after the men failed to elect him as captain. In doing so, Allen attempted (successfully) to stoke the fires of resentment and wounded honor felt by Willson in order to bump himself up from second to first lieutenant. Thus, Willson’s wounded pride may have remained latent had it not been prompted by malicious behavior on the part of Lieutenant Allen. Benjamin Allen may have sensed his hold on his lieutenancy disintegrating and decided to remove at least one obstacle to office.

150 Hubard letter to brother James, 29 September 1861, in Hubard, Memoirs of a Virginia Cavalryman, 17-19. It seems that either Perkins or Allen was a junior second lieutenant, thus accounting for two second lieutenants at the same time. However, Hubard also referred to the election for Perkins’ vacant position as an election for third lieutenant. It seems that in Hubard’s company third lieutenant and junior second lieutenant were interchangeable. Hubard noted that the company elected junior and first lieutenant’s and was more specific about those positions.
Hubard believed his own candidacy to be undermined by Elijah Grigg just as Willson’s was undermined by Allen. Hubard wrote his brother that although he was not elected the “reason was satisfactory” since it was not due to “personal unpopularity” but rather Hubard felt he was “deprived of the votes of the young and thoughtless by Elijah Grigg’s running and electioneering.”151 Grigg violated the gentlemen’s code of how elections should be conducted by campaigning among the enlisted men and Hubard was confident had it not been for this breach of etiquette he would have been elected. For his part, Hubard displayed the appropriate amount of self-politicking by giving “two short speeches, one before the election, the other after the first ballot.”152

For all of their politicking, Grigg remained a private and Allen lost his bid for first lieutenant and remained a second lieutenant. Allen’s conduct, like Griggs’, was deemed ungentlemanly by Hubard. According to Hubard’s ideas on how gentlemen should conduct themselves, Allen should have resigned his second lieutenancy as soon as he declared himself a candidate for the office of first lieutenant. However, Hubard noted in italics that Allen, although defeated on the first ballot for first lieutenant “yet he holds on” to his second lieutenancy.153 Allen’s conduct upset Hubard but Hubard was able to keep himself above such low displays of character and console himself that although he was not an officer, since he only wanted an office if he could obtain it “in a gentlemanly, independent way-otherwise not.”154

Having (somewhat) sorted out the captaincy and first and second lieutenant offices, it remained for the company to elect a new man to fill Perkin’s vacant seat. In all, five people ran for Perkin’s vacant office of junior second (or possibly third lieutenant). The company dropped

151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
the lowest two vote getters and ran the top three on a third ballot and then the top two from the second ballot in a final and third ballot. Unfortunately for Hubard and his comrades, the third ballot tied with both candidates receiving thirty votes, extending the drama. Writing again to his brother on October 9, 1861, over a week later, Hubard told his brother since the two candidates had tied a new election had been ordered at which both men tied for votes again. They were both then dropped from consideration, presumably since the deadlock could not be broken, and three entirely new candidates were ran. Again, the bottom vote getter was dropped after the first ballot and Hubard wrote that the second ballot was to be held that day but he felt “there is so much party spirit neither will be elected, wanting a majority of the whole troop” and hoped that “perhaps Colonel Johnston will have to appoint me.”

Numerous elections during the fall and winter of 1861 led to high officer turnover among Virginia units. Historian Thomas P. Nanzig calculated that between September 1861 and April 1862, the 3rd Virginia Cavalry suffered a ninety-three percent turnover rate among officers ranked captain and higher. With so much turnover, elections must have been an ever-present feature of camp life in the regiment which necessitated the need for some form of regularity when holding elections. While parliamentary rules may not have applied, it seems that Hubard’s troop had established rules for their elections. When he wrote that a majority of votes was needed to gain election, Hubard either meant that a significant portion of the troop abstained or that a plurality was needed for election. Either way, Hubard’s company was concerned that an officer may be elected without the support of a significant portion of the troop which demonstrates his concern about both the democratic process and fairness. There were clearly

155 Ibid.
156 Hubard letter to brother James, 9 October 1861, in Ibid, 21.
157 Nanzig, 3rd Virginia Cavalry, 14.
established procedures for dropping men from ballots as well as breaking impasses. New elections were to be held if a consensus could not be reached but there was a limit to how long the troop was willing to put up with a vacant seat and the politicking that came with the election and the Colonel was used to break long-standing deadlocks.

While the 3rd Virginia had a higher than usual officer turnover in the fall and winter of 1861, officer turnover in Virginia regiments was part of the scenery of camp life. Officers resigned for myriad reasons. The men of Hubbard’s company offer a typical range of reasons. Captain William A. Perkins, the choice of Hubbard and his comrades as captain in September 1861, resigned in March 1862 to take care of his “wife and 8 children left with no support on sudden death of my father.” 158 In the same month, Second Lieutenant Benjamin W. Allen also resigned due to a left arm injury. 159 In other regiments, officers resigned for similar reasons. George Dickinson of the Engineer Corps, arrived at his post to find his daughter dead and his two oldest sons “very ill” and his wife was “completely broken down and is threatened with an attack of sickness herself.” 160 As a result he felt compelled to resign his commission. Captain Edward Mowry of the 46th Virginia Infantry resigned because of “his men’s dissatisfaction with him.” 161 Many officers, especially older ones, were forced to resign due to ill health. Such a high turnover rate in officers undoubtedly had an effect on Virginia regiments, however, more research is needed to fully extrapolate the impact of officer turnover on morale and combat effectiveness as the army readied itself for battle in spring of 1862.

The amount of politicking and scheming seen in the Cumberland Light Dragoons was par for the course for Confederate officer elections post-First Manassas, especially during the

158 Quoted in Nanzig, 3rd Virginia Cavalry, 122.
159 Ibid, 94.
160 George Dickinson letter, 5 December 1861, Rives Family Papers, Section 6: Mss 1 R5247 b 13-81, VHS.
161 Darrell L. Collins, 46th Virginia Infantry (Lynchburg, VA: H.E. Howard, 1992), 129.
reorganization elections in spring 1862. Memoirs and letters home are full of references to surreptitious schemes and “electioneering,” a pejorative term for those who sought election rather than waited to be asked to stand for office. John Robson, a private in the 52\textsuperscript{nd} Virginia Infantry remembered “passing through an ordeal of electioneering” that spring and that “in some cases, much trickery was resorted to by aspirants to secure the soldier vote for company offices.”\textsuperscript{162} Henry A. Hefflefinger of the 50\textsuperscript{th} Virginia Infantry wrote home in early May 1862 that “there is a great stir here about the election[.] you never saw such an election…in you life[.] the election will come off today[.] Jef Lawson is running for cap and Boys Against him tho he dont no it [?] until the election comes off[.]”\textsuperscript{163} Charles McAlpine, captain of company G, 41\textsuperscript{st} Virginia Infantry, needed “the supervision and direction of Col. Jno. R. Chambliss Jr, commanding 41\textsuperscript{st} Reg. Va Vols” during his company’s election.\textsuperscript{164} Why exactly Colonel Chambliss’ supervision was required and what exactly Chambliss directed the company to do is unclear. However, since McAlpine also wrote “no election of Junior 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} Lieutenant was made….as after [?] ballotings, no one on of the candidates received a majority of all the votes of the company” Chambliss may have been on hand to ensure the actual voting was done according to rules either Chambliss or the company had decided upon.\textsuperscript{165} Not only does McAlpine’s letter reflect again on the desire of Confederate soldiers for upholding democratic principals in their officer elections it also demonstrates that colonels of regiments exercised at least some degree of control over elections in their regiments.

\textsuperscript{162} John Robson, \textit{How a One-Legged Rebel Lives-Reminiscences of the Civil War-Campaigns of Stonewall Jackson (Durham, NC: The Educator Co. Printers and Binders, 1898), 25.}
\textsuperscript{163} Henry A. Hefflefinger letter to Delilah Jessup, 5 May 1862, Accession #13257, UVA.
\textsuperscript{164} Charles McAlpine letter to Lt. Col. Archer, 11 May 1862, Accession # 42035, LVA.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
Eugene Blackford, a Virginian serving as captain of company A, 5\textsuperscript{th} Alabama Infantry, and his experience running for Lieutenant Colonel of his regiment shows how cultural differences between southern states made Virginia elections unique because of the importance placed upon gentlemanly conduct during elections. Blackford’s sense of honor would not allow him to run for the office of Colonel once he had promised his support to another, but he did allow himself to be run for the lieutenant colonelcy. Blackford drew a contrast between both himself and his opponent as well as their respective home states of Virginia and Alabama. He wrote “my opponent having principles which would permit him to do such thing canvassed the regt. diligently making promises here and there- Of course I would not do this, tho I do not blame Capt. Hall, it is considered very honorable and proper in his country.”\textsuperscript{166} Even with Captain Hall’s electioneering Blackford believed he:

would not have been defeated had he [Hall] not discovered somehow that a company from [6th Ala.?] had been transferred to us and would come over to vote. The vote of this company was unanimously for him!(?) and I was defeated by a few votes. Had not I been so compromised as to be unable to become a candidate for the Colonelcy I would have had hardly any opposition.\textsuperscript{167}

Blackford’s letter shows that rather than compromise their principals, some officers risked losing elections. The distinction Blackford made between Virginia and Alabama regarding proper election conduct is worthy of note. Blackford implied that in Alabama, soliciting votes and making promises to the electorate was not considered ungentlemanly but that no Virginia gentleman would deign to court votes. Rather, the Virginia gentleman should simply allow his name to be put forth and be elected on his own merit. There may be many reasons for such a cultural difference, ranging from the demographic makeup of the Deep South (in large part made

\textsuperscript{166} Eugene Blackford letter to mother, 30 April 1862, UVA.  
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
up of ambitious second sons of Virginia and Carolina planters) to the type of rough and tumble
culture of violence in the Deep South described by historians such as Bertram Wyatt-Brown and
John Hope Franklin.168

Principles regarding gentlemanly conduct in elections often affected officer elections in
Virginia regiments. Robert Hubard Jr., the 3rd Virginia Cavalry’s perennial candidate for office,
held principles which forced him to remain in the ranks. Hubard wrote after the war that when
Captain Perkins resigned in March 1862. Hubard “was again induced to be a candidate for 1st
lieutenant. But I would not electioneer at all. An offer was made of about sixteen votes if I
would carry the vote of my supporters for a particular candidate for junior 2nd lieutenant. I very
promptly, and I have since always felt properly, refused.”169 Unfortunately for Hubard, his
opponent (George H. Matthews Jr.) held no such qualms and while Hubard was away on picket
duty, Matthews accepted the offer to swing his votes in favor of Peyton R. Browne who was
subsequently elected junior second lieutenant while Matthews was elected first lieutenant.170
Hubard made it clear that Matthews election came about because “he was very active and used
arguments and persuasions which I scorned to use against him.”171 Both Hubard and Blackford
lost out on higher office because of their refusal to engage in “electioneering” practices they
believed to be beneath their dignity as gentleman.

The election held in Thomas Henry Carter’s King William Artillery battery in spring
1862 exhibited many typical aspects of officer elections in Virginia units: erosion of trust and
efficiency among the officer corps, uncertainty regarding election validity, continued concerns

168 See Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor and Bruce, Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South and Franklin, The
Militant South for further reading on the culture of violence in the antebellum Deep South.
169 Hubard, Memoirs of a Virginia Cavalryman, 28-29.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
about upholding fair, democratic elections, and a desire to act according to a gentleman’s code. Carter wrote to his wife in late April 1862 that “I was unanimously re-elected but they turned out every one of my Lieutenants-Fontaine[,] Ryland[,] & Hawes much to my regret…There is some doubt whether the election was valid.” General Robert Rodes, in whose brigade Carter’s battery was a part, believed those men who were thirty-five years old and over would not be held in service. Since these men would be discharged shortly, they apparently did not vote in the election. Rodes sent a telegraph to the Secretary of War, George Wythe Randolph, for clarification about their voting eligibility. Unfortunately, no record exists of the reply. In a May 1 letter to his wife Carter mentioned that a reply had been received but he had yet to learn its contents. Nonetheless, it is clear that Rodes and Carter were concerned that the election was possibly invalid because a portion of the battery may not have been eligible to vote. Just as concerning to Carter was the loss of the battery’s officers. The loss of all three of Carter’s subordinates during the spring 1862 elections could not have failed to reduce his battery’s combat readiness, at least until Carter either learned to trust his new officers in their new roles or those officers were replaced.

Just as we have seen in Robert Hubard’s troop and Charles McAlpine’s company, a desire to uphold what they considered fair, democratic election principles led the men of Carter’s battery to adopt rules for elections. They decided that candidates could run for one office only instead of either running for multiple offices or electing the third-place vote getter to the third lieutenancy. Officer candidates in Carter’s battery also had a desire to uphold their gentlemanly principles. Carter wrote his wife that his brother William “told the Company he did not wish to run against Ryland and Hawes but would run for the 3rd Lieutenancy. They [the men] ran him

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172 Carter letter to wife, 29 April 1862 in Gunner in Lee’s Army, 123.
Carter’s brother was elected first lieutenant while both Hawes and Ryland were not elected.

The spring 1862 election in Carter’s battery provides an illustrative example of multiple characteristics of Virginia company-level elections that occurred post-Manassas. Unlike the elections which occurred in April, May, and June of 1861, elections held after featured an increased amount of electioneering. This was a result of a social upheaval in which non-elites contested the rights of elites to hold office in the Confederate military. Unaccustomed to practicing gentlemanly principles regarding elections, these men struck elite “gentlemen” as crude and ambitious and caused increased resentment when elites lost elections. While Carter’s brother won an election against other gentlemen in a manner which was consistent with gentlemanly principles, other newly elected officers used skullduggery and manipulation to gain office. The increase in anger as a result of such methods led to resignations, bitterness among some of the remaining officer corps, and a general lowering of efficiency as some captains were stuck with lieutenants they generally felt contempt for since they believed the new officers were either ignorant of their duties, lacked the necessary character, or both.

As a result of electioneering, many companies adopted rules governing their elections. These rules seem to have differed among units and were likely based up the individual units’ experience. However, at their base, all the rules had fairness and a respect for democracy in mind. Carter’s men were particularly concerned that one man would announce himself as a candidate for multiple offices, a scenario they felt unfair to others. In other words, Carter’s men felt a candidate should run on his own merits and not seek to scoop up a lieutenancy by gaining third or fourth place votes. While some units, particularly militia units such as the Petersburg

\[173\] Ibid, 123.
Dragoons and the Richmond Howitzers, both pre-war militia units, had already established rules governing their elections, new volunteer units had to come up with their rules as necessity demanded. Indeed, as Carter’s battery shows, many units were unsure of the eligibility requirements of men being discharged but still technically in service.

Election rules represented an attempt to diminish the chaos that characterized early war mobilization as well as the rancor officer elections produced post-First Manassas. While early war companies used a variety of methods to elect their officers, voice voting was most common. This remained the usual method throughout the war, however, such public displays of loyalty to certain individuals (and thus, disloyalty to others) within Confederate companies led to increasing acrimony. Elections also led to a subversion of traditional gentlemanly codes of conduct and often officers from a higher social background were either non-elected or failed re-election due to their desire to maintain a code of conduct that became increasingly less valued by the enlisted electorate. A refusal to engage in “electioneering” tactics by gentleman officers caused upheaval in the junior officer corps of Virginia units during the fall and winter of 1861 and spring of 1862. It also created personal divisions among officers and men in companies such as Robert Hubard’s and Eugene Blackford’s. Still, both enlisted soldiers and officers remained resolved to continue the citizen-soldier tradition of officer elections. As a result, democratic principles, notably vote plurality also remained paramount. Indeed, some companies decided to not elect anyone to a rank and serve in a company without its full complement of officers if a plurality could not be achieved.

The high turnover rate of officers, combined with the election of officers who did not have the full trust of a company’s captain, negatively impacted the efficiency of Virginia Confederates as the battle season of 1862 approached. Captains had to learn to trust their new
officers, a process which took time the Army of Northern Virginia did not have. While many of those elected proved to be capable officers, many did not. Captain Randolph Harrison of Company H, 46th Virginia Infantry was certainly pessimistic and in a letter to his wife in late April 1862 offered this observance, “we are expecting to have a reorganization of our regiment. They have been playing havoc with company and field officers over the river generally turning out their best officers.”174 Others, like George Washington Peebles, a private in Company C, 5th Virginia Infantry Battalion, were more optimistic about the outcome of elections. Peebles wrote in his diary, “heard to day that this company will be reorganized and a complete new set of Officers elected with the exception of Capt. Let them rip. Sic Semper Tyrannis.”175 Harrison and Peebles, were both Virginia Confederates; however, because of their positions as officer and enlisted man respectively, they had different views on the outcome of the spring 1862 elections.

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174 Randolph Harrison to Elizabeth Harrison, 30 April 1862, in Sheehan-Dean, Why Confederates Fought, 67.
175 George Washington Peebles diary, 20 February 1862 in Ibid.
Chapter II
The fall and winter 1861 transformed citizens into soldiers, whether or not they had seen combat. Enlisted Virginians endured changes in camp life from the early months of the war, including environmental exposure, disease and its accompanying casualties, homesickness, discipline, and punishment. A small group of Virginia Confederates did become combat veterans during this period. Their new experiences affected their expectations of officers and their votes in officer elections.

In turn, officers had to navigate the evolving expectations of their men in order to win reelection. Regardless of how enlisted men felt about discipline, officers knew unit effectiveness relied on discipline. An officer’s efficiency and competency, as well as impartiality when meting out discipline, could overcome enlisted resentment toward strict disciplinarians. However, officers still needed to learn how to bend certain rules in order to allow their men a certain measure of personal autonomy. Officers were faced with maintaining their units’ discipline and their personal popularity, a hard task to manage and a task at which many officers failed. In many cases, officers from elite backgrounds were unable to mute their arrogant and haughty manner toward enlisted men they often deemed their social inferiors. Thus, the most challenging negotiation revolved around class difference, as elites and non-elites struggled to adjust their preconceptions about class difference with the reality of day to day interactions under trying circumstances.

Enlisted soldiers expected their officers to display a high degree of morality and to act as spiritual guides for their men. Religious expectations placed upon officers were one part of a larger expectation of paternal behavior enlisted men wanted officers to display. Attitudes surrounding antebellum paternalism dictated enlisted expectations of their officers regarding clothing, shelter, medical care, as well as spiritual welfare. Elites in antebellum Virginia were
expected to act as paternal figures to lower-class whites, slaves, children, and their wives, and Virginia Confederates transferred this expectation to their junior officers during the Civil War. However, many officers were unable to fulfill a paternal role without patronizing their men. Elites made it clear they felt above non-elites by evidencing a condescending manner toward non-elites. Further exacerbating class tensions, elite officers were confronted with challenges to their military and social positions by non-elite soldiers during elections. Class tensions boiled since elite officers resented non-elites attempts to gain election through electioneering among enlisted men. By failing to electioneer among their men, many enlisted soldiers felt slighted, and unwilling to engage in what they deemed the ungentlemanly practice of electioneering, many officers lost their rank during the spring 1862 reorganization elections.

Enlisted men and officers negotiated their relationships against the backdrop of newly punishing Confederate policies, such as national conscription and dimming prospects for furloughs. Late winter 1861, and early spring 1862 was the most critical period for officers who wished to be re-elected. Many soldiers felt they had done their duty and they wished to return home. Officers who desired to remain in their positions needed to re-enlist enough soldiers to fill their companies, otherwise the company would be disbanded. Enlisted men used this period to exact certain concessions from their officers, most especially furloughs. While junior officers did not have control over Confederate military policies, they did have some influence over recommending men for furloughs or turning the other way when men straggled or simply left to make their own furloughs. Likewise, officers had no control over conscription and in many cases condemned conscription since it forced them to campaign to keep their positions. Unlike April and May 1861, when elites were elected both from a sense of deference, as well as expediency, elite officers now had to demonstrate their value to their men. Demonstration often
meant electioneering, a practice elite officers resented. Enlisted soldiers were able to mitigate the effects of Confederate military policy better than officers. Furloughs were simply taken when they were slow in coming, and officers were often afraid to punish such “deserters” lest those same men fail to re-elect them. Enlisted men also used conscription to exact certain promises from their officers such as furloughs and relaxed discipline. Officers often felt helpless to do much about the slack discipline they believed conscription and re-election brought and in many cases, were unwilling to engage in electioneering to gain re-election. Ultimately, many officers proved incapable and/or unwilling to successfully keep their own sense of class, remain popular officers, and navigate the effects of Confederate policies.

Turning first to the experiences of the rank and file, most men had spent little to no time in battle by spring 1862, and thus combat experience had little influence over their expectations of officers. William F. Baugh of the 61st Virginia Infantry wrote home that “we have a fine [?] in Moseley but not much of a soldier but we surely can get on better than we did.” Even when troops did see battle their officer’s performance often did not outweigh other qualities. Captain William McLaughlin of the Rockbridge Artillery “manifested much coolness and courage in the battles” yet was still non-elected because he failed to provide even-handed discipline. While most troops were involved in small skirmish affairs or perhaps had the opportunity to fire a few coastal artillery rounds at Union ships, only a small percentage of men under arms had engaged in a full-scale battle. For all its fanfare in the newspapers, the “races” at Philippi involved only about eight hundred Confederate troops, indeed, for all the marching Virginia soldiers did in western Virginia in 1861 only a few battles took place and those battles involved small numbers

176 William Fielding Baugh letter to mother, 29 May 1862, LVA.
177 Lanty Blackford to father, 21 November 1861, UVA.
of men, usually Confederate forces numbered in the thousands rather than tens of thousands. The First Battle of Manassas in July 1861 was the largest battle of the year in the eastern theater, yet most Virginia troops never left their assembling camps in time to participate or were stationed elsewhere across the state during the battle. For most troops, 1861 consisted of the initial enthusiastic, chaotic, and patriotic enlistment period during the spring and early summer of 1861; then endless drilling, boredom, and life adjustment as they became accustomed to army life and discipline.

Camp life for many Confederate soldiers was decidedly more misery than fun in the fall and winter of 1861 than it was in the first few months of the war. John Worsham and his comrades in the 21st Virginia Infantry were able to partake of the many diversions Richmond had to offer soldiers by “running the blockade” (avoiding the picket guard) in May 1861 while at Camp Lee, located on the outskirts of the city. Soldiers stationed in Alexandria in early May 1861 lived in “brick and mortar” barracks where “bunks, cooking and washing utensils abound, and the whole affair reminds one of the real soldiers’ home.”

On June 1, 1861 Robert Parker of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry wrote his wife that he thought he might be home in “a few days or a few weeks” and that he liked the “camp life equally as well as I expected.” Camp life was easy enough for Parker’s company that on July 8, 1861 he could write his wife “if you want to

178 Most of the “battles” in the 1861 western Virginia campaign were really large skirmishes. The campaign was effectively over after the Union victory at Cheat Mountain in September 1861. For further reading see Clayton R. Newell, Lee vs. McClellan (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1996).
179 At First Manassas, ten Virginia infantry regiments were actually engaged in the battle along with three companies of the yet to be formed 47th Virginia Infantry. Six artillery batteries were engaged. Returns for cavalry companies are less certain because a number of Virginia cavalry companies fought as independent commands during the battle. OR Series 1, Volume 2, 568.
180 Worsham, One of Jackson’s Foot Cavalry, 34-35.
181 Alexandria Gazette, 1 May 1861.
182 Robert Parker letter to wife, 1 June 1861, in Lee’s Last Casualty: The Life and Letters of Sgt. Robert W. Parker, Second Virginia Cavalry, ed. Catherine Wright (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 3.
see lazy men, come to camp.” \(^{183}\) It is unclear whether Parker was disgusted with the laziness or not. Regardless, that the men were lazy (and apparently unpunished) is instructive of the way camp life was for many Virginians in the war’s first few months. Worsham and Parker both remembered camp life in the early months fondly, although Parker’s letters betray the pervasive sickness of Civil War camps that was more deadly than any Yankee. Even though Parker continually wrote his wife about the disease ravaging his company, he remained upbeat in June and for most of July. After the battle of First Manassas, however, Parker’s attitude, along with many others, changed. Parker wrote his wife on July 31, 1861 that “it is somewhat distressing times in our company now,” a marked change in Parker’s attitude from July 16\(^{th}\) when he wrote “death occurs frequently” but remained optimistic regarding his own time in the service if he could retain his health.\(^{184}\) Parker’s optimism had begun to wane when a week later he wrote that two of his company “look comparatively like shadows” and that “several others are in very bad health.”\(^{185}\)

Many of the troops who participated at First Manassas camped close to the battlefield in July and August 1861 and encountered unsanitary conditions and disease. These conditions led to a deterioration in morale and contributed to an overall dissatisfaction with military service in late summer and fall and winter of 1861. John O. Casler and his comrades in the 33\(^{rd}\) Virginia Infantry called their camp at Manassas “Maggot Camp” because of the “impurity of the water and the stench.”\(^{186}\) Just like Casler and Parker, thousands of other Virginians endured horrific casualties from disease in 1861. Although men such as Parker were at first determined to be

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183 Robert Parker letter to wife, 8 July, 1861, in Ibid, 10.
184 Robert Parker letter to wife, 31 July, 1861 and 16 July 1861, in Ibid, 19, 12.
185 Robert Parker letter to wife, 7 August 1861, in Ibid, 21.
186 Casler, *Four Years in the Stonewall Brigade*, 47.
optimistic in their letters home, by the beginning of fall 1861, letters home began to take on a more despairing tone.

Civil War soldiers recognized that poor campsite selection, along with bad weather, had an adverse effect on their health which in turn lowered morale. Historian Kathryn Shively Meier argued that it was an officer’s job to promote morale and when they failed to do so “the structural sources of encouragement” fell apart. She also found that soldiers were able to accurately link diseases such as ague, malaria, typhoid, diarrhea, and dysentery to large amounts of rain and improperly sited or laid out campsites. The resulting breakdown in morale due to a combination of bad weather and poor campsite choice contributed a general lack of morale among troops as the spring 1862 elections approached.

Although company commanders often had no choice in their units posting, some officers did their best to alleviate their men’s exposure. Captain Joseph Jones of the 20th Virginia Infantry wrote to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper in September 1861, and stated that in July his company suffered fifty cases of measles, which had left his men “unfit for the hard service of the northwest,” and that only twenty-five of his thirty-eight men were fit for duty. Jones believed that if his men were given a furlough home for thirty days to “recruit their health and attend their business” his company could be salvaged. Jones thus attempted to help his men in two ways: first, he asked for a transfer to a healthier climate, and second, he requested furloughs for his men.

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188 Ibid, 47.
189 OR, Series 1, Volume 5, 880.
190 Ibid. Jones may have felt comfortable writing direct to Adjutant General Cooper since his company had been on detached and independent service since July.
In combination with sickness, soldiers also had to contend with homesickness. Homesickness was made more acute by the belief many soldiers had that their sickness could be cured if they were given furlough to go home and recuperate. Thus, in some soldiers’ minds, being denied a furlough meant continued separation from loved ones as well as an increased chance of death. In the same letter that Robert Parker mentioned his “shadow” comrades to his wife he lamented that, “it is very hard indeed now for anybody to get a furlough.” He wrote in September 1861 that one of his comrades was given a furlough to visit his sick wife but wished his own “time would come soon” and expressed a “hope the men…who are leaving on account of sickness…will return soon.” Although a number of men in Parker’s company had received medical furloughs, Parker himself was resentful that others were able to see their families while he lived in boredom in an army camp. When he wrote his war memoir, Willie Bean of the 4th Virginia Infantry corresponded frequently with his former captain, Hugh White. Speaking for White in his memoir, Bean recounted White’s difficulty in obtaining a furlough and chalked up the difficulty to the application process. He noted that all applications for absence had to be approved by superior officers up the chain of command all the way to General Joseph Johnston, commander of the army. The onerous process involved in getting a furlough meant most Virginia Confederates stayed in their camps in the winter of 1861. While some sick soldiers were able to obtain furloughs to go home and recuperate, soldiers who maintained their health had no such luck. Some, like Parker, grew resentful at the furlough process and comrades who used whatever pretext necessary to gain a trip home.

191 Ibid.
192 Robert Parker letter to wife, 8 September 1861, in Lee’s Last Casualty, 31.
Regardless of rank, soldiers had a difficult time obtaining leave to see their families and many soldiers resorted to going absent without leave in order to go home. John O. Casler of the 33rd Virginia Infantry remembered that during the winter of 1861 “some six or seven” of his company had trouble getting a furlough and so “took a ‘French Furlough,’” a soldier’s term for being absent without leave. It is evident as well that the six or seven men tried to first obtain a medical furlough, or at least began the process, since Casler noted they all visited the doctor the morning before they left and were prescribed medicine. Since a trip to the hospital was likely the only path to eventually going home, these men decided to simply take matters into their own hands. It is easy then to see why men such as Parker would become resentful at certain comrades who tried to game the system in order to get home. Casler went on to say that such an act was not considered desertion at the time, and that if “French Furlough” men returned of their own volition they often escaped arrest and were instead given extra guard duty. However, if someone had to fetch them, they were made to ride a “wooden horse,” a punishment which consisted of a soldier straddling a sawhorse for hours on end. The problem of “French Furloughs” was acute enough that when one of his company’s officers left that winter for Hampshire County to gather the absent men, he returned with sixteen of them.

French Harding’s captain was likewise lenient toward “French Furloughs.” Harding remembered that during the fall of 1861 “our discipline was very slack, and some of us, under the guise of scouting, were allowed to go and come almost at will…so long as the direction we took was toward the enemy, which in our case was toward home, we were encouraged to go.” For soldiers such as Casler and Harding, who were camped near their homes, homesickness was

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194 Casler, *Four Years in the Stonewall Brigade*, 49.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
197 Harding, *Civil War Memoirs*, 16.
a problem somewhat easily solved, and one which fortunately carried no harsh punishment. For
the majority of Virginia Confederates though, posted far enough from home to make the journey
impracticable, boredom and discipline were much of what they experienced over the winter of
1861. Some, like Harding, noted a lack of discipline, a problem which became more
troublesome to officers as the spring 1862 campaign season approached.

During the Civil War, the efficacy of an officer was often tied directly to his ability to
manage discipline effectively in his unit. However, enlisted expectations of discipline were far
different than officer expectations, especially during the first year of the war. Virginia
Confederates tended to elect wealthy men who could afford to provide material items for their
men. Those wealthy men were usually socially prominent or what people considered “elite”
members of society. In his study of social relations in antebellum and Civil War Lynchburg,
historian Steven Elliot Tripp argued that during the antebellum years “customary patterns of
social relations had worked well enough, because elites generally came through when their
benevolence was needed but otherwise had the good sense to leave the lower classes alone.”
However, during the early months of the war the “behaviors and decisions” of elites had a
greater impact on the lives of their subordinates, and “more often than not, soldiers found that
their officers fell short of what they expected of military leaders.” Unfortunately, Tripp did
not detail what those expectations were. Historian Stephen Berry provided more detail on
specific expectations and argued that elite males in the antebellum south were “expected to
provide a varied constituency- slaves, women, children, and (in some measure) poorer whites-

198 Tripp, Yankee Town, Southern City, 94.
199 Ibid, 95.
with an array of goods and services: food, shelter, clothing, justice, moral leadership, and a sense of common identity and direction.”

Berry’s assertion strikes particular importance for Civil War officer elections since the expectations civilians in the antebellum period placed on elite men were the same that enlisted soldiers placed on their officers, elite or otherwise. Virginia officers largely fulfilled expectations regarding clothing and armament; harder to provide was justice and moral leadership. An inability to manage enlisted expectations regarding discipline and respect for personal autonomy in 1861 often led to an officer’s non-election in 1862. Conversely, successfully managing the dichotomous values could lead to election in 1862. Such was the case with Hugh White, elected captain of Company I of the 4th Virginia Infantry in April 1862 and who was “to his company…exceedingly kind, but his kindness never assumed the form of partiality. He was just.” Unlike White, the experiences of Captain’s William McLaughlin of the Rockbridge Artillery and William Fleming Harrison of the 23rd Virginia Infantry, both of whom were not re-elected, provide insight into how officers who mismanaged their company’s transgressors needed to find new positions in spring 1862.

In November 1861 “Lanty” Blackford’s replied to his father’s question concerning the character of the Rockbridge Artillery’s officers. Blackford wrote that his captain, William McLaughlin, had been “generally popular” until three or four weeks ago, when several men became drunk during the battery’s march to Centerville. McLaughlin then “betrayed some deficiencies in his conduct as an officer” when he “manifested great lack of promptness, decision

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200 Berry, All That Makes A Man, 19.
201 J. William Jones, Christ in the Camp or Religion in Lee’s Army (Richmond, VA: B.F. Johnson, 1887), 142.
202 William McLaughlin was promoted to General John Echols’ staff and later became commander of an artillery battalion. William Harrison was non-elected in the spring of 1862 and he may have been the William F. Harrison listed on the rolls of the 40th Virginia Cavalry Battalion (later 24th Virginia Cavalry Regiment).
and energy in punishing the offenders, and when he did punish them, meted out retribution with an uneven hand.” In Blackford’s opinion, McLaughlin sometimes allowed offenders to go unpunished and at other times punished offenders too severely. Blackford’s final analysis was that McLaughlin was “indolent, vacillating, [and] inefficient…though perfectly competent…to his post.” 203

It took just one incident in which McLaughlin was unable to deal fairly with drunken soldiers to lower his standing as an officer in the eyes of his battery. 204 McLaughlin had many traits that recommended him as an officer; he was “competent,” a “sociable and pleasant gentleman,” and had “manifested much coolness and courage in battles.” Nonetheless, McLaughlin’s inability or unwillingness to mete out what many of his men considered just punishments lowered the overall discipline of his battery. 205 At least in part, McLaughlin’s lack of evenness was due to his inability to manage the men in his company. Blackford noted that McLaughlin allowed offenders to go unpunished so that he could “keep them in order,” and he compounded this transgression when he took “it out in keeping those who behave well in too strict rule.” 206 In April 1862 McLaughlin was not re-elected. Officers such as McLaughlin faced pressure to keep their men’s behavior in line and this often meant punishing men for offenses such as drunkenness and insubordination, “crimes” that formerly independent Virginian’s bristled at being punished for. If an officer punished such offenses too harshly or too frequently he ran the risk of being voted out of office. As McLaughlin found, the men who generally followed the rules took exception at the uneven application of justice, and so McLaughlin lost that group’s support as well.

203 Lanty Blackford letter to father, 21 November 1861, UVA.
204 Blackford’s letter makes clear that it is this particular incident which has lowered McLaughlin’s esteem.
205 Lanty Blackford letter to father, 21 November 1861, UVA.
206 Ibid.
Some officers attempted to be fair by reasoning with their men when enforcing discipline. Captain William Fleming Harrison wrote his wife in early July 1861 that, “I have told them that I had to obey orders & I was carrying out the order of my superior officers & I had to obey & they should obey.” Harrison continued his efforts to reason with his men when he wrote his wife in early April 1862. A number of men had deserted from his company and Harrison believed they had absconded home to Goochland County. Rather than simply order the deserters arrested, Harrison asked his wife to ask John Wilson (presumably a resident of Goochland) to see the deserters and “tell them if they don’t return forthwith they will be arrested as deserters & and brought back which will be very disagreeable.” In the end, Harrison’s men failed to appreciate his efforts since he lost his bid for re-election in 1862. The difficult balance between courting popularity and effectively performing an officers duties was a challenge many officers could not successfully navigate, and which ultimately led to a change in a company’s officer corps when it was time to elect officers.

Soldiers tended to bear punishment better if it was meted out with fairness. Royall K. Figg, a member of Parker’s Battery from Richmond, remembered in his memoir that his original battalion commander Stephen D. Lee was known to tie soldiers up as a form of punishment and was known by all “as a strict disciplinarian.” Lee was yet able to command his men’s respect, since “his strictness, however, was commended by its impartiality. He made no distinction against the private soldier, nor in favor of the commissioned officer. In fact…he was more popular among ‘the men’ than among the officers.” Captain Parker “did not spare the rod.” and Figg recollected that Parker would strap offenders to caissons as punishment. Virginians’

207 William Fleming Harrison letter to wife, 4 July 1861 in Sheehan-Dean, Why Confederates Fought, 57.
208 William Fleming Harrison letter to wife, 3 April 1862, in Ibid.
209 Royall W. Figg, Where Men Only Dare to Go or the Story of a Boy Company, C.S.A. (Richmond, VA: Whittet and Shpperson, 1885), 75-76.
letters home show that at the time, soldiers were upset with being punished for what they perceived as minor infractions, and at being punished in ways that had previously been reserved for slaves or the lowest of white men. However, after the war, soldiers memoirs consistently recognized the importance of discipline in maintaining effectiveness in the army. As much as he may have resented the punishments at the time, Figg wrote after the war that if all the officers in the Confederate armies had been, even in matters of discipline, like Lee and Parker, the cause for which they fought might not necessarily have been ‘lost.’”  

When officers did decide to discipline their men in a physical manner they did so in a number of ways. As Casler remembered, some men were made to ride a “wooden horse.” William Brand of the 5th Virginia Infantry saw “three men walking up and down our regiment carrying their knapsacks as a punishment for their misconduct.” Private John Worsham of the 21st Virginia Infantry remembered seeing men whose “hands and feet were put through the rails [a rail fence], and tied together on the opposite side of the fence, in such a position that they could not move.” While such penalties must certainly have been dehumanizing for the men who experienced and witnessed such punishments, officers who were seen as strict disciplinarians could still manage to win their men’s support as long as they doled out discipline with equality.

Some officers were able to blend an irascible demeanor with efficiency, competency, and impartiality to command the respect, if not the love, of their subordinates. Virginia politician John Herbert Claiborne described Confederate Surgeon General Samuel Moore as “a man of great brusqueness of manner, [who] gave offense to many who called on him, whatever their

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210 Ibid.
211 Casler, *Four Years in the Stonewall Brigade*, 49.
212 William Brand to Kate Armentrout, 15 September 1861, Papers of William Francis Brand, MSS 11332, UVA.
business, and without any regard to their station or rank.” Nevertheless, Moore “was an able executive officer, and I believe an efficient and impartial one.”214 The aforementioned “Grumble” Jones, John S. Mosby’s first commanding officer, was seen by Mosby as a man who “had strict ideas of discipline, which he enforced, but he took good care of his horses as well as his men.” Every morning Jones would hold a horse inspection, and if a trooper’s horse was found wanting, Jones publicly upbraided the soldier.215 Although Jones would publicly curse men, his efficiency as an officer, and equal application of his wrath, allowed him to cultivate respect among his men. Jones’ personality was abrasive, but his impartiality and efficiency as an officer overrode qualms his men had about his rough manner toward them.

During the Civil War, efficiency was highly sought after in officers and was defined as an adjective which meant “producing effects.”216 These positive effects ran the gamut to anything from unit cohesion on the battlefield, discipline in camp and on the march, training a well-drilled unit, keeping men healthy, and providing for soldiers material and moral needs. Moreover, from their letters and memoirs, it is clear that efficient also meant taking decisive action. Not only did “Lanty” Blackford criticize McLaughlin for his inability to evenly distribute justice, McLaughlin was “vacillating and inefficient.”217 In comparison, Blackford wrote in the same letter that his first lieutenant, William Poague, was a “dignified, efficient and competent officer.”218 Robert T. Hubard criticized General John Magruder’s strategy as “the most vacillating in the world, plainly indicating a want of decision and firmness.”219 Hubard especially prized efficiency as shown by

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214 Claiborne, Seventy-Five Years in Old Virginia, 199-200.
215 Mosby, Memoirs, 22.
217 Lanty Blackford letter to father, 21 November 1861, UVA.
218 Ibid.
his eulogy of Lt. Col. John T. Thornton as “a sensible, wise, efficient commander.” John S. Mosby did not criticize “Grumble” Jones’ strict discipline, because in addition to being evenly enforced, it also aided the troops’ efficiency. Sometimes the adjective spoke for itself as when artillery captain Greenlee Davidson wrote to his cousin James about another cousin named Lou who was “a good, efficient, officer.” While the word may have held specific nuanced meanings for different soldiers, efficiency, in all its forms, was highly sought after among officers.

While some officers could combine a curt manner with a degree of efficiency and retain the loyalty and respect of their men, other officers could not, and suffered the consequences of their brusqueness, arrogance, and general rude behavior. Rudeness and brusqueness were generally tolerated by soldiers if the rude officer was efficient and unafraid to practice what he preached; however, historian Aaron Sheehan-Dean stated that Virginians “rarely abided aristocrats who presumed to lead by status alone.” Some soldiers who aspired to office recognized this and acted accordingly. Sergeant Robert W. Parker of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry wrote to his brother in late October 1861 and bluntly said “if you have a chance for a higher office, run for it. You must never get mad or fretted; just determine you won’t get mad at anything, for if you suffer yourself to get fretted, you are sure to say something you ought not.” Unfortunately, for some officers’ aspirations, they were not so attuned to enlisted grievances. When he wrote his memoir, Private John O. Casler of the 33rd Virginia Infantry.

220 Ibid, 59.
221 Davidson, Captain Greenlee Davidson, C.S.A., 27. Lou was Lewis Davidson who became captain of company D, 10th Virginia Cavalry and was a militia colonel in 1860.
222 Sheehan-Dean, Why Confederates Fought, 55. For excellent examples of the methods soldiers used to reject pretentious officers see Sheehan-Dean, Why Confederates Fought, 53-57 and Charles E. Brooks, “The Social and Cultural Dynamics of Soldiering in Hood’s Texas Brigade.”
223 Robert W. Parker letter to George Parker, 30 October 1861 in Lee’s Last Casualty, 42.
recalled that after the Battle of First Manassas the regiment’s adjutant, L. Jacquelin Smith, was dismissed from camp by Colonel Arthur Cummings for cowardice during the late battle. His loss was greeted with joy by Casler since Smith was “a fop in kid gloves” and “wanted to be very strict, especially on dress parade,” but Smith’s greatest sin was that he “put on more airs than a Brigadier General.”

Though the process of moving from citizen to soldier was arduous for men and the officers who supported them, negotiating class difference was even more challenging amidst these difficulties. Virginia Confederates were citizens first and soldiers second, and as such they expected to retain certain rights from their civilian lives. Negotiating a middle-ground between establishing authority and granting men personal respect and autonomy as fellow white southerners was a problem faced by all officers. Officers often used enlisted expectations of paternalism, moral character, and religious behavior to navigate class tensions. However, enlisted expectations of paternalism clashed with enlisted expectations to be treated as equals. While officers were being asked to continue their antebellum role of paternal figures, they were also being asked to interact in a more equal manner with those they considered their social inferiors. Likewise, elite officers faced threats from non-elites in elections and were slow to adapt to the changing nature of elections, particularly regarding electioneering. Officers who were late to discover a solution to class tensions, or who simply did not care to pander to those they considered inferior, faced losing their commissions in elections held throughout the fall and winter of 1861 and spring of 1862.

Some officers attempted to negotiate the line between authority and personal liberty by bending rules in camp and on the march, particularly regarding straggling and furloughs. While

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224 Casler, *Four Years in the Stonewall Brigade*, 47.
“Lanty” Blackford and others in the Rockbridge Artillery felt their captain, William McLaughlin, was too lax in his enforcement of discipline, other enlisted men were thrilled at being allowed to do as they pleased. Private James E. Hall of the 31st Virginia Infantry happily wrote in late October 1861 that, the “Capt. has returned. He is disposed to accommodate us as much as he can.” When the Richmond Howitzers elected Lieutenant Edward McCarthy as captain in April 1862, McCarthy reminded the men to “never forget I am always with you whether for fun or a fight.” McCarthy wished his men to know that not only would he lead them in battle, but he would also still be their friend; their social relations would continue as before.

Rule bending was also expected while on the march. Even as late as fall 1863 this expectation persisted. In October 1863, Captain French Harding of the 31st Virginia Infantry gave his men permission to fall out of the marching formation when the road became too rough on their bare and bleeding feet and allowed them to march alongside in the grass. The regiment’s colonel “noticed this breach of discipline, and in unscriptual language, roughly ordered them to take their places in the ranks” whereupon an “altercation ensued” between the colonel, Harding’s men, and eventually the colonel and Harding. In summation of the event, Harding noted that “this was the fourth time the Colonel and I differed unpleasantly, principally on account of the way I cared for my men.” Confederate officers were well aware they owed their positions to the enlisted men in their company, and so allowed those men to bend rules in camp and on the march. We have seen earlier that Harding and his men (at a time when Harding was still an enlisted man) were given free liberty by their captain to come and go from camp as they pleased so long as they returned and “scouted” in the direction of the enemy. Harding and

226 McCreery, First Co. Richmond Howitzers, VHS.
227 Harding, Civil War Memoirs, 111.
his men had grown used to such a style, a style most would call undisciplined (indeed, Harding himself termed it such). It seems reasonable for a Colonel to expect march discipline from his men, but Harding’s company had come to expect a more lenient posture toward such behavior, and thus rebelled against what they considered unjust. Likewise, while there were undoubtedly many reasons Harding was elected captain, certainly one reason was that he treated his men with a soft hand regarding their lack of discipline. Indeed, he had engaged with many of them in “scouting” the previous winter and Harding noted in his memoir that his election “made very little difference in our relations.”\textsuperscript{228}

In the antebellum period, paternalism was mostly confined to elite men’s interactions with slaves and their own wives and children. Since paternalism when practiced among white men revolved around class, paternalism was most prevalent in companies composed of primarily non-elite groups of soldiers, and officers found it less necessary to practice paternalism within elite companies.\textsuperscript{229} However, in less elite companies, officers recognized that their role as superior officers closely mirrored their role as elite gentry. Thus, in companies composed of a majority of men from a high socio-economic class, more fraternalism than paternalism was found. Nonetheless, aspects of paternalism were apparent in almost all Virginia companies.

Antebellum religious attitudes that soldiers carried into the war directly affected their views of what made an officer a “good man,” irrespective of class or wealth. Many historians have argued that the winter of 1862 and the fall of 1863 were the primary times of religious revival during the Civil War, especially for the Army of Northern Virginia, points which have

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid, 33.
\textsuperscript{229} See Tripp, \textit{Yankee Town, Southern City}, 27-37, 83-100. While all three (race, class, and gender) aspects have been studied by historians, race, and more recently gender have been overwhelming more popular studies. Historians have focused less on white male-on-white male class based paternalism.
been proven as near to fact as can be.\textsuperscript{230} However, the fall and winter of 1861 also saw heavy religious activity (not necessarily revivals) among the troops, chiefly among those who already held religious attitudes. Religion was an important feature of camp life, as well as initial officer elections, in spring 1861; however, religion took a more prominent role in elections in the fall and winter 1861 and spring 1862 as officers’ vices became apparent, and enlisted soldiers turned to religion to relieve camp boredom, homesickness, and to deal with grief from the loss of comrades from disease and combat. Enlisted men looked toward their officers to provide religious and spiritual guidance, an expectation officers were well aware of. Aware or not, some officers failed to live up to such expectations and that failure had implications for elections in fall and winter 1861 and spring 1862.

Almost as soon as Virginia troops enlisted they began to hold religious services in their camps. In mid-May 1861, Frank Jones, at the time adjutant to General Stonewall Jackson at Harper’s Ferry, wrote his wife that he estimated about 150 men attended the Methodist service held in camp.\textsuperscript{231} Some companies, such as the Liberty Hall volunteers, were composed of a highly religious demographic and so were influenced more by religious attitudes than other companies. Captain Hugh White estimated that about half of the original company professed to be religious and wrote that after roll call each evening, the company held a prayer.\textsuperscript{232} Often, if a chaplain was not present, company officers led prayer services. A correspondent for the \textit{Southern Churchman} wrote of the troops camped at Centreville in 1861 that “some of the officers pray with their men at morning roll call; others meet with them in the cabin at night.”\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{230} Religious revivalism in the Army of Northern Virginia in 1863 has been established. However, historians have for the most part neglected aspects of religion outside of revivalism, especially during 1861.
\textsuperscript{231} Frank Jones letter to wife, 13 May 1861 in Colt, \textit{Defend the Valley}, 63.
\textsuperscript{232} Jones, \textit{Christ in the Camp}, 131-132.
\textsuperscript{233} Ibid, 40.
Beginning almost immediately, and continuing through 1861, into 1862, and the revivals of 1863, Confederate officers were expected to help sustain their men’s spiritual welfare.

Officers used religion to command influence and respect among their men. Officers were expected to use religion to provide moral leadership as well as spiritual leadership. Numerous primary sources point to the fact that officers and potential officers were aware of this and the expectation dictated their actions accordingly, especially when a company was composed of a less elite demographic. William W. Blackford was one officer who was aware of the effect moral leadership could have on men. He suggested to his brother “Lanty” in May 1861 “that to obtain influence over young men in a moral point of view, never bore them, join in with them in all innocent amusement & if possible lead in such things, dance, sing, introduce games, all of which have a good effect. Then when you speak on religious subjects the effect is very strong.” Another Blackford brother, Benjamin, a Lieutenant of Engineers stationed in Norfolk, closely echoed the same idea when he wrote his mother concerning Captain Robert Pegram. Pegram, he wrote, was “dignified & stately but at the same time singularly gentle and courteous thoroughly good tempered and fond of fun- moreover he is an earnest simple hearted Christian.” For Dr. Rev. Robert Ryland, President of Richmond College, a Baptist seminary, piety and conceptions of how a southern gentleman should behave were inseparable. He urged his son in July 1861 not to boast or engage in “private hatreds” and to be “refined without being affected.” Gentleman officers could “relax into occasional pleasantries, without violating modesty” and be “humble, spiritual, and active Christians, and yet mingle in the stirring and perilous duties of soldier life.”

234 William W. Blackford letter to “Lanty” Blackford, 30 May 1861, UVA.  
235 Benjamin Lewis Blackford letter to mother, 17 August 1861, UVA.  
236 Dr. Rev. Robert Ryland to son, 17 July 1861, in Jones, Christ in the Camp, 29.  
237 Ibid.
negotiating a line between maintaining amiable friendships with one’s men, but also representing oneself as an upright, moral Christian in order to gain and maintain respect and influence.

When an officer failed to live up to his men’s expectations of how a Christian should behave there were often repercussions. For soldiers from the heavily evangelical community of Lynchburg the morality of their officers was of great importance. Drinking, gambling, and whoring by officers so grated the sensibilities of these Christian soldiers that they felt compelled to complain in writing to the editor of the *Lynchburg Daily Virginian*. Some soldiers felt that although they looked to their officer for moral and religious guidance, in matters of religion, those same officers were equals under the eyes of God. Private Royall Figg wrote of an incident in which his captain (William W. Parker), failed to understand this. At a company prayer meeting, their captain was asked to lead the men in prayer, yet the captain did not “kneel meekly, like one of us, and lead in prayer” which caused Figg to wonder, “are not all men equal- on their knees? Does not Saint Paul say ‘there is no difference?’ But it seems that this man who would be our Captain even *in forma pauperis*.” Luckily for Parker, his inability to match his men’s idea of Christian equality did not lead to any lasting repercussions or public censure in the press.

While many officers recognized the importance of religion and pious action in gaining and maintaining respect among their men, some officers failed to live up to the religious expectations set for them by their troops.

The influence an officer had on his men regarding moral and religious aspects was beneficial not only for his own advancement, but also for his men’s well-being and his company’s performance. The editor of the *Petersburg Daily Express* opined that regarding advances in warfare, great technological achievements made logistics and movement less

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239 Figg, *Where Only Men Dare to Go*, 21.
problematic. However, the greatest advance was in “the increased attention paid to their [soldiers’] moral and religious welfare. They are no longer regarded as a sort of outcasts, to be drilled into machines of war— but they are recognized as social, responsible beings.”240 J. William Jones, author of Christ in the Camp, recounted a story of a “wicked” captain who “exerted a bad influence over his men,” which in turn led the company to become “the most wicked in the regiment.”241 Once the “wicked” captain was replaced with a captain who was “a consistent Christian, and a man of earnest, deep-toned piety” and “showed that he cared for their spiritual as well as their physical interests,” the company did an about-face and became just as good as any other in the regiment.242

Since paternal figures were supposed to act as moral leaders and inculcate their charges with a common sense of identity, officers often used religion as a medium to fulfill these expectations. Officers used moral uprightness to command the respect of their men and set an example for the behavior expected of enlisted soldiers. Religion was also used to provide soldiers of all ranks with what historian Amy R. Minton called “respectability.”243 She argued that respectability was in part based on the outward material signs of wealth, but more importantly, respectability was based on “character, morality, and conduct.”244 Minton also argued that respectability and patriotism became synonymous during the war. Richmond newspapers printed article after article in which respectability and patriotism were inextricably linked in an effort to promote a “sense of common Confederate identity.”245 Thus, in the same

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240 Petersburg Daily Express, 24 June 1861.
241 Jones, Christ in the Camp, 34.
242 Ibid.
244 Ibid, 83.
245 Ibid, 82.
way that newspapers attempted to breach social and class divides, and unify white Southerners around the Confederate cause by using respectability (which emanated from an individual’s character, regardless of wealth or class), officers used religion to provide a common sense of identity and direction to their soldiers in the field.

Historian Kurt Berends argued that the religious military press, or newspapers, tracts, and other printed material that was intended for soldiers and distributed by various churches, pushed a narrative beginning in 1863 that “the ideal soldier was a Christian soldier,” and that “Christianity embodied the same values that would bring southern victory.” Berends and Minton’s arguments complement each other in that they both argue Christian values were necessary for Confederate victory. Confederates believed that acting as an upright Christian would aid their ultimate victory. Thus, when officers failed to shepherd their men toward Christian values, officers were seen as lacking in the respectability required of their position as well as harming the Southern cause.

Religious expectations placed on officers fitted neatly into antebellum conceptions about paternalism and the place of elite land-owners in society. Historian Peter Carmichael argued that his sample of the “Last Generation” (elite Virginians who came of age in the 1850s) valued membership in the land and slave-owning class and a life of “aristocratic ease.” At the same time, they “craved bourgeois respectability, hungered for professional success, followed personal ambition, and desired the material trappings of a middle-class lifestyle.” This dichotomy was negotiated by the ideal of the Christian gentleman. This ideal held that a man was to be “pious,

246 Kurt O. Berends, “‘Wholesome Reading Purifies and Elevates the Man’: The Religious Military Press in the Confederacy,” in Religion and the American Civil War, 132.
247 Carmichael, The Last Generation, 10. Carmichael defined the “Last Generation” as the group of Virginian’s in his study sample who came of age in the 1850s, most of whom came from slaveholding families and had attained a higher education.
248 Ibid, 10-11.
self-controlled, educated, and the master of his household.” Someone able to provide the goods and services to those placed beneath him in the social hierarchy, in other words, a paternal figure, was seen as a pious master of his household. Since the ideal Christian man was also a “master of his household,” paternalism and religion went hand in hand.

From a logistical standpoint, officers were tasked with providing their men with adequate food, shelter, and clothing. Providing clothing, usually from one’s own pocket, was an especial expectation placed on officers throughout 1861 and into spring 1862. Shelter, in the form of adequate tents, but more especially satisfactory camp sites, was also expected to be provided by officers. Part of the concept of southern paternalism involved the paternal figure providing adequate housing for those under his care, thus, an officer’s inability to do so in some cases directly contributed to their non-election. On a rainy day in November 1861, the 5th Virginia Infantry began marching toward Winchester where the residents had offered to quarter the regiment in their homes. When they were less than a mile away from shelter and warmth, the regiment was ordered to countermarch and camp a mile outside of town. At this point, according to Private William F. Brand, “officers refused to obey the order, the Colonel [William H. Harman] swore he would be obeyed and drew his soard & ordered his Brother [Asher Harman] to forward his Comp[any].” Asher Harman refused and was placed under arrest by his brother, whereupon Asher’s lieutenant was ordered to move the company. He also refused and was placed under arrest. At this point the scene degenerated into chaos. Brand wrote that he was “smartly excited at the time of the fracus[,] the Col struck one of Harmens men, with his soard[.] A grate many of the men ware getting out catriges[,] others fixing thare bayonets. I expected

249 Ibid.
250 William F. Brand to Kate Armentrout, 15 November 1861, UVA.
nothing but a big row as the Col. is not loved by any of his men.”

The “mutiny” of the 5th Virginia shows that Virginia Confederates expected to be given a justification why they should follow a seemingly unreasonable order. They also exhibited their willingness to exercise their perceived right of refusal to obey such orders. It also shows that troops expected their officers to provide for their comfort. An inability to do so carried the threat of non-election; or in the case of the 5th Virginia an outright mutiny.

While many soldiers preferred to practice their own form of self-care regarding their health, others expected their company officers to tend them in times of sickness, just as paternal figures in the antebellum South had been expected to do. While actual, physical care was most often undertaken by women during the antebellum period, the paternal figure was nonetheless responsible for making sure it was provided. Historian Steven Tripp provided a detailed look at the military career of Captain Charles Blackford of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry and concluded that Blackford ranked as a “good” officer because he “regularly shared a portion of his provisions with his men, kept a constant vigil over the sick and wounded…[and] purchased new blankets [for his company].”

Captain Lewis Coleman of the Louisa “Morris” Artillery was well liked because he supplied “all the wants of his men, furnishing them, when necessary, with shoes and clothing from his own purse, nursing them personally when sick.” These officers were forced to take on a more hands-on, feminine role because of the contingencies of war. Sometimes officers had to comfort their men in less material ways such as when the officers of General William Loring’s command, stationed at cold and desolate Romney in the mountains of western...

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251 Ibid.
253 Tripp, Yankee Town, Southern City, 100-104.
Virginia (now West Virginia) during January 1862, sent a petition to Stonewall Jackson asking to be ordered to Winchester. Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin ordered Loring’s men back to Winchester, which prompted Jackson to submit a letter of resignation that he withdrew a week later. The next day, Jackson preferred charges of insubordination against Loring, which eventually led to his transfer and the disbandment of Loring’s Army of the Northwest. Jackson showed a lack of concern for his men’s well-being and placed Loring’s command in a vulnerable position, which undermined those troops health and morale. The subsequent chain of events, which ended with an entire army being transferred, is a large-scale example of the repercussions which might ensue if troops felt their officers were not living up to their paternal responsibilities.

Elitist paternalism acted as both a positive and negative force for officers. The attitudes taken by elite officers toward poorer, less socially prominent ones, often led to their defeat in elections held subsequent to a company’s initial muster. Robert Hubard of the 3rd Virginia Cavalry wrote his brother after one of his company’s numerous elections held in the fall and winter of 1861. Hubard stated he lost the vote, but he was unconcerned since it was mostly the “young and thoughtless” who had voted for others. Hubard’s willingness to run for office, but apparent unconcern with the opinions of those he considered beneath his intellect, shows how elite attitudes toward poorer enlisted men led to a rejection during elections. Hubard’s condescending manner toward those he considered his social inferiors, and those he deemed had not earned the privileges of manhood, almost certainly contributed to his defeat.

256 Jackson was incensed that Loring had operated outside the chain of command and that Benjamin had countermanded Jackson’s order.
The patronizing of those common soldiers who had to perform their own camp tasks such as laundry and cooking could not have failed to go unnoticed by enlisted soldiers. Even when elite soldiers served in the ranks willingly, they made sure to differentiate themselves. No mention was made of the nobility or honor of yeoman and poor whites service in the Confederate enlisted ranks, yet, numerous wartime and postwar accounts show that more socially prominent enlisted men felt their service was somehow more honorable and sacrificing than others. Even after months of soldiering some men were still unwilling to serve with those who they considered social inferiors. “Lanty” Blackford wrote home that he would only re-enlist in a company that could provide the same social companionship that the Rockbridge Artillery gave him. His sentiments were also affected by an unwillingness to serve as a private with members beneath his antebellum social standing, “I can stand it being a private very well, but I cannot stand, and will not if I can help it, being in an indiscriminate crowd…I cannot and will not make companions of such.”259 Blackford’s letter home was written when he was yet a private in the Rockbridge Artillery and still surrounded by those he considered to be his social equals. It is difficult to imagine his election to office in a company composed of those he considered his social inferiors since he evidenced no desire to mingle with more common enlisted men.

Officers and enlisted men had to negotiate the aforementioned complexities of their evolving relationships amidst new and strict Confederate policies, notably regarding furloughs and conscription. Furloughs were often given at the discretion of an army commander, even after Confederate legislation, and Confederate commanders placed obstacles in the path of soldiers who hoped to secure formal furloughs in the winter and spring of 1861-1862. The vastly different priorities between soldiers and high command regarding furloughs created a tension.

259 “Lanty” Blackford letter to father, 10 December 1861, UVA.
that junior officers were expected to resolve. In many cases this task proved too difficult for officers and resulted in failed bids for re-election. Soldiers likewise prioritized officer elections in order to maintain their rights within the citizen-soldier tradition. However, both the Confederate government and high command viewed elections as injurious to discipline and had little faith enlisted men would elect what officials and commanders deemed to be the best candidates.

Conscription changed the nature of the contract soldiers had with their government by compelling soldiers to serve, and officers were asked to re-enlist their men while also forcing a new military service relationship on their men. Similar to managing furloughs, this task was often beyond the capabilities of junior officers. Many men felt as Captain Robert Neblett of the 9th Virginia Infantry did. Neblett wrote on June 18, 1862 that “I think I have done my duty. I have been in active service over twelve months and I have sacrificed more than any other Capt from my section of country. Of course I will not resign as long as there is a probability of a fight around Richmond.” Many soldiers felt that it was others turn to enter military service, yet, although soldiers wished to resign or not re-enlist and return home, the same sense of duty that compelled them to enlist also kept them in the ranks.

Confusion about furloughs and the authority to grant them caused anxiety and tension among enlisted men, government officials, and Confederate commanders. This confusion especially affected Virginia soldiers. The commander of the Confederate Army of the Potomac (later named the Army of Northern Virginia), General Joseph E. Johnston, established a general rule at least by September 1861 that no furloughs were to be permitted to anyone in the army, citing concern over the Federal forces close by in Washington. Johnston became dismayed

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260 Robert Neblett letter to father, 18 June 1862, VHS.
261 OR, Series 1, Volume 5, 830.
then when, on January 1, 1862, General Order Number One was issued from Adjutant General
Samuel Cooper. General Order Number One was the Confederate military’s order implementing
“An Act to Raise an Additional Military Force to Serve During the War” (commonly known as
the Re-Enlistment Act). The act, passed by Confederate Congress on December 11, 1861,
stipulated that troops currently enlisted as twelve month troops who re-enlisted for three years or
the duration of the war, would receive a furlough home, a fifty-dollar bounty, and the right to
reorganize and elect their officers upon the expiration of their original enlistment. Soldiers
would also have the ability to transfer to a different unit if they wished.262

There was almost immediate confusion about the new act. Johnston wrote to Secretary of
War Judah P. Benjamin for clarification about the new law and expressed concern that a large
amount of furloughs would be “incompatible with the safety” of the army. Johnston also wrote
for clarification on exactly when the men would receive the furloughs, as well as how many men
at any given time would be allowed to return home.263 Benjamin wrote back that he understood
allowing a large part of the army to leave temporarily, or risk them leaving altogether, was a
“choice of evils.”264 Yet, he urged Johnston to encourage re-enlistment with the use of “liberal
furloughs,” ultimately deferring both the timing and amount of furloughs granted to Johnston’s
own discretion.265 Johnston apparently ordered his division commanders to limit furloughs to
twenty percent, though twenty percent of the entire division, or individual regiments or
companies is not clear.266 It appears General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson was likewise given
authority over furloughs in his army since he wrote to General Johnston in February 1862 that he

262 OR, Series 4, Volume 1, 302. See also OR, Series 1, Volume 5, 1016.
263 OR, Series 1, Volume 5, 1037.
264 OR, Series 1, Volume 5, 1045-1046.
265 Ibid.
266 OR, Series 1, Volume, 5, 1069.
had authorized furloughs for one-third of the rank and file of his army. In early March, General John Magruder, commanding Confederate forces on Virginia’s lower peninsula, issued a public address to his troops that acknowledged the “disappointment of withdrawing from you the furloughs to visit your homes which the Government promised you.” But, unlike Johnston and Jackson, Magruder took steps to blame military necessity on a lack of furloughs since “the present dangers of our beloved country alone forbids it to grant.”

While army commanders doled out a small number of furloughs, the Virginia legislature passed a law which made moot any debate over furloughs, at least for Virginia troops in Johnston’s army. Johnston wrote to A.P. Hill on February 12, 1862 that he had “directed…that for the present no more furloughs be given to the members of Virginia regiments” since he supposed legislative kinks would need to be worked out between Confederate law and Virginia law. Johnston sent a similar letter to General Jackson two days later. The law Johnston referred to was a militia bill passed on February 8, 1862 which quickly turned into a de facto conscription bill. Governor John Letcher persuaded the state legislature to pass a law (February 8, 1862) that stipulated all white males between the ages of eighteen and forty-five register with state militia officials and “hold [themselves] in readiness for draft for active service.” Along with the law, Letcher encouraged men to volunteer for active service as a way to choose which unit they wished to serve with, tacitly informing everyone that a statewide draft was eminent. Indeed, the editors of the Richmond Enquirer informed the public “those who have not volunteered will be compelled to enroll themselves in the service of the state.”

267 Ibid.
268 Richmond Daily Dispatch, 10 March 1862.
269 Ibid.
270 OR, Series 1, Volume, 5, 1069.
271 Greene, Civil War Petersburg, 71-72.
272 Richmond Enquirer, 11 February 1862.
on March 7, 1862, an amendment to the February 8th law classed men between ages eighteen and forty-five as First-Class Militia, while boys aged sixteen and seventeen and men aged forty-six to fifty-five would be organized as Second-Class Militia. The very next day Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin requested forty thousand troops from Virginia and Governor Letcher immediately called up the First-Class Militia and offered them for national service.273

While the Virginia militia bill may have caused concern for men already in the ranks, the Confederate Conscription Act certainly did. The Confederate Conscription Act, passed in April 1862, made all men aged eighteen to thirty-five eligible to be conscripted for army service and extended the enlistments of twelve-month enlistees to three years. It also allowed those units who reenlisted, as well as newly enlisted units, to hold officer elections upon reorganization. This was to be the last instance of widespread officer elections in Confederate armies as the act stipulated that after the reorganization elections, officer vacancies would be filled by promotion by seniority. The remaining exception was the election of men to the most junior vacancies in companies, second or third lieutenants, but a week later on April 21, 1862, Congress authorized the President to appoint officers to fill vacancies “as a special reward for ‘valor and skill’ displayed in action” giving the President the right to fill even those junior positions as well.274

Confusion over reenlistment and conscription continued into April 1862. The law caused as much confusion in the ranks as it did among the high command. The ordeal of the Portsmouth National Grays, or Company L of the 3rd Virginia Infantry offers an enlightening vignette into how confusion over the Re-Enlistment Act (along with resentment toward an officer) could lead to turmoil among units. While camped at Yorktown in April 1862, the Portsmouth men decided to take advantage of the act to enlist in companies from the Portsmouth area in other regiments.

273 Greene, Civil War Petersburg, 71-72.
274 Bledsoe, Citizen-Officers, 29.
They were especially keen to escape service under Colonel Roger A. Pryor whom they felt was too overbearing. Pryor mustered the company and accused the men of cowardice for wanting to leave the Yorktown lines while a battle was eminent. A spokesman for the company replied, “Colonel Pryor, we are not leaving on account of the enemy or approaching battle, but we do not desire to serve any longer under your command, but if we are put under the command of Major Scott every man will cheerfully remain here until the battle is over.” Pryor then asked every man who wished to serve under Scott to take three paces forward, and all but four of the company did so. As a result, Pryor had Major Scott take them to Yorktown jail and charged the men with mutiny. The men were then put to work on the Yorktown fortifications under the command of North Carolina troops under D.H. Hill. It was not until the Portsmouth men were acquainted with the intricacies of the re-enlistment act (it only allowed for individuals or companies to transfer regiments with the permission of the regiments’ commanders and the War Department) that they agreed to serve under Pryor.

Almost nobody in the government or high command wanted to continue the practice of officer election, and so conscription served the double purpose of filling the ranks of the army, as well as getting rid of a system of promotion described by one soldier as “that sadly injurious and strengthening agency of democratization.” Andrew Bledsoe found that officer elections were maintained in spring 1862 because the Confederate High Command recognized that conscription “removed the very essence and identity of the volunteer citizen-soldier by making his service compulsory.” Retaining the officer election system during the spring 1862 reorganization elections was meant as a salve to many Confederates’ loss of personal autonomy. Confederate

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276 Ibid.
277 Hubard, Memoirs of a Virginia Cavalryman, 56.
278 Bledsoe, Citizen-Officers, 30.
officials were willing to undergo one final round of elections in order to ensure conscription was accepted by enlisted soldiers.

Conscription, whether on the state or national level, was received with anger by some officers and applause by others. Despite anger at conscription among many, other soldiers recognized that conscription kept the army intact at a period when the war hung in the balance. John Mosby offered perhaps the best description of the dichotomous attitudes that the Conscription Act produced. Mosby acknowledged that the act “impaired the esprit de corps” of the army, but that it also “saved the Confederacy from the danger of collapse without another battle through the disbandment of its army.”279 Even though Thomas Carter was upset at the volunteer system of officer election perpetuated by conscription, he still considered conscription a good idea since the promise of a furlough and a re-enlistment bonus was, in his opinion, not enough to induce sufficient numbers of men to re-enlist. He raged to his wife that “man is selfish- patriotism a thing you read of. They hope in a new organization to get some office.”280 In almost every letter home over the winter of 1861, Carter wrote of impending doom if a draft were not established and the militia not called up. A typical missive went as follows, “the new act offering a bonus to those who reenlist for two years or the war is thus far a failure… drafting is the only mode to raise an army for next summer.”281 Some felt that conscription was needed in order to preserve the interests of elites. James Henry Hammond, a former Governor of South Carolina, offered a particularly elitist view on conscription. He wrote his son in November 1861 that rather than send the cream of Southern society off as privates, drafting lower class whites to serve in the ranks would be better advised. He also believed that “volunteers are only good for a

279 Mosby, Memoirs, 98.
280 Thomas Carter letter to wife, 29 December 1861, in Gunner in Lee’s Army, 83.
281 Thomas Carter letter to wife, 17 December 1861, in Ibid, 79.
30 days’ campaign” and told his son “we shall have to review our past decision against a Standing Army.”

Thus, many officers believed Southern patriotism was flagging and conscription was necessary to both maintain and bolster the army’s ranks for the upcoming spring campaign.

Officers who condemned conscription did so mostly because the act provided for the continued election of officers. Robert Hubard felt conscription was “a disgraceful piece of demagogism, that did more than all other things combined to bring about our final defeat” since, in his opinion, enlisted men tended to elect “the most amiable men, who would indulge them most or the most unprincipled who resorted to all kinds of intrigue to secure success.” He also believed that even after the spring 1862 elections officers were afraid to enforce discipline because they feared another “reorganization.” Robert Stiles likewise believed that “the selection of military officers by the elective method is a monstrosity, an utter reversal of the essential military spirit of military appointment and promotion.”

Elite officers almost universally condemned conscription as a recipe for leadership failures, both at the time, and continuing through the war years. Such condemnation was also part of elite officer resentment at either being forced to campaign for their positions or lose their rank. It is understandable that such men would view the officers that were elected, often through the use of electioneering, with disdain. Socially elite officers also disliked electioneering because as historian Andrew Bledsoe argued, elections and especially the process of electioneering, “broke down social and economic divisions between classes” as men from all

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283 Bledsoe, Citizen-Officers, 52-53.
284 Bledsoe, Citizen-Officers, 52-53.
285 Stiles, Four Years under Marse Robert, 73-74.
ranks of society mingled with one another by electioneering. Those who disliked electioneering felt that if it were not for the Conscription Act, they would not have had to engage in electioneering. This line of thought belies logic, however, since the troops’ twelve month enlistments were up and officers who wished to remain in the army would have needed to seek re-election at the head of new troops; either way elections, and subsequent electioneering would have occurred. It may be that logic was thrown by the wayside in the heat and resentment of the moment.

The Conscription Act was passed during a period when many Virginia Confederates were debating the best course of action regarding their re-enlistment. For many troops, re-enlistment offered a way to seek new companions, new officers, or a new branch of service and may have offered a way to higher rank. Ham Chamberlayne wrote his wife of his decision to re-enlist but to transfer to another unit. Currently serving with the 21st Virginia Infantry, Chamberlayne believed “Walker’s [Captain Lindsay Walker commanded the Purcell Battery] offer opens a good road to promotion, & the position of sergeant in a good battery.”

Robert Parker of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry was willing to continue his service in the 2nd Virginia, but only if he could serve under his current captain. He wrote his wife that “if Capt. Graves does not reenlist and make up a company, I think it very likely, if I reenlist, I will join heavy artillery, but don’t know yet what to do for the best.”

While men like Chamberlayne and Parker were willing to re-enlist, albeit with certain caveats such as transfer to a unit with better promotion prospects or service under a specific captain, other soldiers, like Private James E. Hall of the 31st Virginia

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286 Bledsoe, Citizen-Officers, 39.
288 Robert W. Parker letter to wife, 22 March 1862, in Lee’s Last Casualty, 71-72.
Infantry were determined to return home regardless of a change in circumstance. He wrote in his diary on December 27, 1861 that his units “commanders are getting to be tolerably good to us now. The reason is that during next month we will be asked to reenlist again.”

Despite his officer’s newfound amiability, Hall concluded “not to volunteer again. Our officers have not given us any encouragement to do so. We have had but one continual scene of hardship compared with other troops. We have had duties to perform which no regiment in this brigade has performed.” Hall was particularly incensed that his regiment had been forced to build winter huts for other regiments and perform what he considered to be excessive picket duty. By failing to look out for their men and allowing them to be subjected to unfair treatment, Hall’s officers had failed his expectations. Hall did eventually re-enlist in his company and served until the very end, accepting a parole at Appomattox, although his reasons for doing so remain known only to him (one imagines conscription played a role in his decision).

Officers were well aware that if they failed to re-enlist enough troops in their companies their units would be disbanded. With a rank but no company, they would be out of a job and more than likely forced to join the ranks. Thus, in order to keep their jobs as well as maintain any semblance of an organized army, officers used various methods to induce their men to re-enlist. Stationed in Romney, a place one soldier described as “pretty well shaken to pieces,” Colonel Samuel Fulkerson of the 37th Virginia Infantry wrote his congressman in January 1862 that “with the benefit of a short furlough for the men, I am satisfied that at Winchester I could have enlisted five hundred of my regiment for the war.” However, since his regiment had endured the Bath and Romney expeditions and remained encamped in such a miserable place as

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289 James E. Hall, diary entry 27 December 1861, in *Diary of a Confederate Soldier*, 43.
291 John M. Ashcraft, Jr., *31st Virginia Infantry*, 120.
Romney, he was unsure he “could get a single man” to re-enlist. Fulkerson remained hopeful though that “if the men could be placed in a position where their spirits could be revived, many of them would reenlist for the war.”292 Captain Thomas Carter’s men in the King William Artillery were seemingly more transparent with their desires since he wrote home his men expected a “quid pro quo in the shape of a furlough” as a condition for their re-enlistment.293 Similar to Fulkerson and Carter who believed that removal to a more hospitable campground and furloughs home would help re-enlistment numbers, Captain Gilbert Rambaut of the Cockade Mounted Battery from Petersburg thought “comfortable quarters, good water, fine battery, and [being] only 50 miles from Petersburg” would induce men to enlist in his company.294 Sometimes, officers already held their men’s esteem and thus needed to do but little to gain re-election. Although they expected furloughs, Thomas Carter believed the men in his battery would re-enlist “if I will promise to command them,” but he did not hold out hope since “when the time comes I do not count on many. Popular favor is altogether uncertain & I have two or three unpopular officers to sustain & bear along as best I can, which often exposes me to injustice & misapprehension.”295 Carter had reason to fear the unpopularity of his lieutenants; all three of his lieutenants were non-elected in the spring of 1862, a fact Carter lamented since he considered all three good officers.296 Carter himself escaped the ignominy of failing to be re-elected and would finish the war a Colonel in command of an artillery battalion.

While most officers were aware of the need to live up to their men’s expectations in order to get re-elected, most campaigned on those expectations reluctantly or not at all. Elite officers

292 OR, Series 1, Volume 5, 1041.
293 Thomas Carter letter to wife, 28 January 1862, in Gunner in Lee’s Army, 97.
294 Petersburg Daily Express, 8 May 1862.
295 Thomas Carter letter to wife, 29 December 1861, in Gunner in Lee’s Army, 83.
296 Thomas Carter letter to wife, 29 April 1862, in Ibid, 123.
were unable or unwilling in many cases to engage in the sort of electioneering needed to maintain their positions, and as a result many were turned out of office in 1862. Thomas Carter was one of the lucky few who maintained both his rank, and his aloof, gentlemanly status by not campaigning for his office, most likely because of his men’s assurance they wanted to be commanded by him. Other officers around Carter were not so fortunate and Carter believed the prevailing “want of discipline results from the 12 mo[nth]s volunteering instead of the war, & from the elective system. The officers from Cols down are courting popularity to be reelected at the reorganization.”

Ham Chamberlayne held the same thoughts as Carter and went further by blaming the entire volunteer system. Chamberlayne believed a “lack of discipline…inherent in the Vol system.” Chamberlayne thought the December “Act to Raise an Additional Military Force” maintained the worst part of the volunteer system (officer elections) by forcing men into the ranks while still allowing them to elect their officers. In his opinion, the idea of being forced into service made men revolt at enlisting or re-enlisting when they would otherwise be willing to do so of their own accord. He also supported conscription if men did not re-enlist in large enough numbers since this would fill out the army as well as allow for officers to be appointed rather than elected.

Chamberlayne did not say why he believed conscription would allow the government to begin appointing officers. Historian Andrew Bledsoe argued that since volunteer, citizen-soldiers had enlisted of their free will, they claimed the right to elect their officers, just as volunteer troops in the antebellum period had. However, granting conscripts the same rights as volunteers, in this case the right to elect officers, caused “division, corruption, and a breakdown of discipline.”

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297 Thomas Carter letter to wife, 22 March 1862, in Ibid, 111.
298 Ham Chamberlayne letter to sister, 15 December 1861, in Letters and Papers of an Artillery Officer, 52.
299 Ibid.
300 Bledsoe, Citizen-Soldiers, 46.
Although most officers recognized that re-election was no guarantee, others seemed oblivious to the possibility of failing re-election. A week before he failed to be re-elected by the captains of his regiment, Lt. Col. John Baytop Cary of the 32nd Virginia Infantry wrote his wife on April 25, 1862 asking for cloth to have a new uniform made, an indication he had no idea his stint as a field officer in his regiment would end in a matter of weeks. Some officers, like Robert Parker’s captain (William F. Graves) seemed unmindful of the effects of the Conscription Act. Parker had no idea “why he [Graves] don’t make a company…If he intends reenlisting, he ought to have been receiving recruits for the past month.” While Graves was able to re-enlist enough men to keep his company organized and maintain his own status as captain, Cary’s and Graves’ experiences show that not all officers were attuned to the realities of elections or the effects of Confederate policy on their position.

While conscription was certainly a hot topic of the day during the spring elections, enlisted men seemed not to care what position officer candidates took regarding conscription. More pertinent to enlisted soldiers was an officer’s ability to provide for their needs, whether material or spiritual. Where conscription did play a role in elections it did so indirectly, mostly through furloughs and a break down in discipline as officers campaigned and electioneered to keep troops in their original units. Since the Conscription Act provided an out for dissatisfied soldiers to transfer to other units, officers and officer candidates had to walk a fine line between maintaining discipline and offering their men what they wanted. Enlisted troops were wont to take advantage of their situation by extorting less discipline from their officers in return for votes, especially when it came to “French” furloughs. Enlisted troops were also more apt to vote for an officer who could cast aside his class prejudices and treat enlisted troops with respect.

301 John Baytop Cary letter to wife, 25 April 1862, Cary Family Papers, Section 1-Mss 1 C2597 b 1-199, VHS.
302 Parker letter to wife, 22 March 1862, in Lee’s Last Casualty, 71.
In conclusion, military efficiency, more specifically camp efficiency, manifested by paternal methods of care such as providing “food, shelter, clothing, justice, moral leadership, and a sense of common identity and direction” as well as providing for the sick, was highly sought after in officer candidates in the spring of 1862. Many of those same qualities were looked for in officers during the spring of 1861, especially the ability to provide clothing and weapons for a newly formed company. However, the experiences troops underwent in during the fall and winter of 1861, a time when Virginia Confederates were truly introduced to the harder aspects of military service, intensified the desire for officers who could provide clothing and weapons, and added new expectations such as justice and moral leadership. An officer’s ability to modify his own actions with changing expectations was crucial to his election or non-election in 1862. Many officers came from elite backgrounds and found it hard to give up antebellum ideologies about their place in the world. Elite officers’ inability to adapt to changing social climates, or their failure to match non-elites’ willingness to interact with enlisted men on a more respectful level, severely impacted elite officers’ ability to gain election or re-election.

While post-war accounts tend to excoriate officer elections as a “monstrosity,” the junior officer corps of the Army of Northern Virginia, under the leadership of a new and dynamic general, Robert E. Lee, was able to defeat McClellan’s advancing army, defeat John Pope’s Army of Virginia at the Second Battle of Manassas, invade northern soil immediately after the battle, and end 1862 with a major victory over Ambrose Burnside at Fredericksburg. It is hard to imagine a better year militarily for the major Confederate army in the eastern theater. Thus, elections in spring 1862, which occurred in the midst of new and developing relationships

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between officers and men, proved less fatal to the Army of Northern Virginia than many of its soldiers believed, both at the time and in post-war years.
Conclusion
The original captain of Company C, 1st Virginia Infantry, which existed during the antebellum period as an Irish-American militia company, was John Dooley, Sr., one of the richest men in antebellum Richmond and the father of John Dooley, Jr. The younger Dooley enlisted in Company D of the 1st Virginia Infantry in June 1862 and began a diary in February 1863. During the winter of 1862, Company C received a number of conscripts who were neither Irish, nor veterans. Dooley wrote on April 9, 1863, that since Company C had only one officer, the men desired to elect a lieutenant, and accordingly, Colonel Lewis B. Williams, a Virginia Military Institute graduate, had appointed the next day for the election to be held. The veterans in Company C wanted Dooley, Jr., then a private in Company D, to stand for election since Dooley’s father had recruited them and led them in battle until his resignation in April 1862. The conscripts however, wished to put forth their own candidate, and since they outnumbered the veterans two-to-one, the conscript’s candidate was sure to win. Consequently, the conscripts sent “Private T.” to talk with Dooley and apprise him that “the conscripts….are largely in favour of my election, provided I bind myself to serve their interests.” Dooley gave no such assurance and replied he “never solicited the honour and would make no promise whatever.” Dooley was approached and did not submit his own name for the election. Nevertheless, Dooley was unwilling to campaign or make deals even when his name was put forth, showing that in 1863 some officers still held tightly to the code of gentlemanly conduct established among elites.

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The drama concluded the following day when Dooley was elected lieutenant of Company C. However, the conscripts complained that they were bullied and threatened by the veterans into electing Dooley, as well as by Colonel Williams, who told the conscripts “in case any new recruit was elected, that he would instantly have him examined before the board.” Since the conscripts doubted their choice could pass an officer examination board, Dooley was elected. By 1863 commanders felt little compunction about interfering in officer elections. Colonel Williams felt comfortable publicly stating he would personally see to it that any choice he deemed unworthy of the office would be run out of his regiment. Thus, Williams, a veteran commander, made sure overall discipline and battle efficiency in his command did not deteriorate. At the same time, Williams’ decision to hold an election rather than promote someone from the ranks demonstrates his continued devotion to the citizen-soldier tradition. The appearance of conscripts, men who were compelled to military service, as opposed to volunteers who enlisted of their free will, modified the citizen-soldier tradition. Williams allowed the election but held ultimate power of the choice of officer. Dooley’s election drama also shows that by early 1863, veterans felt comfortable subverting traditional democratic principles in order to assert their privilege as battle tested soldiers and elect their candidate, regardless of the majority vote. The acrimony of the election did not end there. Dooley wrote that “if there was any unfairness in the election I…would rather have remained…in the ranks than to have permitted myself to be elected by means the least unfair.”

306 John Dooley, Jr., diary entry 10 April 1863, in Ibid, 140. Italics are Dooley’s.
307 General Order Number 36 dated 17 May 1862 stipulated that when “the competency of the parties entitled…to promotion is questionable, a board of examiners shall be convened by brigade commanders to determine the candidates’ capabilities.” OR, Series IV, Volume I, 1122. In practice, examination boards were rarely used. For a detailed study of Union officer examination boards see Stanley L. Swart, “The Military Examination Board in the Civil War: A Case Study,” in Civil War History, Volume 16, Number 3 (September 1970): 227-245.
308 Ibid.
social and moneyed elite, still felt constrained by the code of gentlemanly conduct regarding elections.

Dooley’s experience provides a trove of evidence to support the argument that enlisted soldiers continued to use elections as a way to obtain promises of slack discipline from officers. However, Dooley’s election also shows that by 1862, officers were not simply at the mercy of enlisted soldiers during elections. His election also shows a continued desire to elect officers from elite and wealthy backgrounds. The elder Dooley, in addition to leading Company C to war in 1861, was one of Richmond’s wealthiest men and would likely use his family wealth to support the material needs of the company. Enlisted men also continued to elect officers who could provide for their spiritual welfare. While there is no evidence the men of Company C (largely Irish-American Catholics) considered Dooley’s religion when they elected him, John Dooley, Jr., was quite open about his Catholicism during his service, and indeed, Dooley found himself in numerous debates (both friendly and otherwise) concerning Catholicism. The theological differences between Catholics and Protestants may have led the Irishmen in Company C to elect Dooley, a graduate of the Jesuit institute of Georgetown, since they felt he could better provide for their spiritual needs.

Historian Andrew Bledsoe argued that soldiers (both North and South) learned to “adjust their antebellum expectations…to fit their new reality.” Bledsoe attributes a shift from traditional citizen-soldier expectations based upon democratic and egalitarian principles, to expectations more aligned with professional soldiers based upon combat experience and a belief that better officers meant a better chance of survival. However, during the spring 1862

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309 For examples of Dooley’s “debates” on religion, see Ibid, 83, 193, 260, 267. After the war, Dooley returned to Georgetown and was on the cusp of ordination at his death in 1871.
310 Bledsoe, Citizen-Soldiers, 220.
reorganization elections, in which almost all regiments stationed in Virginia took part, few troops had seen enough combat to alter their expectations. Soldiers were familiar with death on a massive scale, but most deaths were caused by disease rather than enemy bullets. Nevertheless, many soldiers did spend the first year of the war adjusting their expectations. Due to the frantic mobilization of Virginia troops in spring 1861, and an inability by the Commonwealth to provide its soldiers with military necessities, many companies elected men who could provide clothing, weapons, and equipage. This meant wealthy and often elite men led Virginia companies during 1861. Soldiers often entered the military with their militia or volunteer company experience fresh in their minds. However, instead of picnics, festive parades, and a quick return home as champions of southern rights, Virginia Confederates found themselves confronted with death, disease, discipline, a loss of autonomy, a lack of and poor equipment, homesickness, and boredom. The reality of military service became apparent to many soldiers after the battle of First Manassas even if they had not yet participated in combat. The timing is indicative of troops settling into permanent camps for the first time, which spread disease quicker. Boredom and homesickness is a reality in any army camp and was no less true for Confederates posted around Virginia. Troops became subject to greater discipline as commanders became more serious about military infractions and drill. Yet, throughout 1861 enlisted soldiers continued to use their position as an electoral base for officers to exact concessions to ameliorate their condition. Rather than submit to discipline as Bledose argued, soldiers routinely left for home on “French” furlough, a situation many officers felt powerless to control lest they lose their position. For their part, officers who were able to blend discipline with a respect for the personal liberty of their soldiers stood high in the esteem of their men. Confederate policies in 1862 made this a much a harder task as officers were forced to
accommodate their troops’ wishes while also enforcing the law. Nonetheless, junior officers managed to re-enlist most of their troops during spring 1862 and ensured the Confederacy fielded an experienced fighting force. Officers also needed to transcend class differences by engaging with their men on a more respectful footing and those who were unwilling to do so were usually not re-elected. Typically, in concert with their men’s expectations, officers used a paternal approach to care for their men. By using paternalism to amalgamate spiritual and material care, officers provided for their men’s expectations and were able to interact with them equally.

Virginia’s citizen-soldiers took their roles as soldiers seriously. However, they saw no need to abandon their status and privileges as free citizens. Enlisted men did not voluntarily relinquish the right of officer elections. The right was wrested from them by a government and high command which together bemoaned the system of elections and feared a resulting undisciplined rabble. However, Virginia Confederates elected a junior officer corps which led them to victory during the Seven Days, Second Manassas, a draw at Sharpsburg, and later victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. Undoubtedly many good officers were turned out for sub-par ones during elections. Yet the Army of Northern Virginia performed admirably, demonstrating that enlisted Virginians were more than capable of choosing officers who were both militarily capable as well as attuned to the needs of their men.
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Vita

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