

**Fighting for Independence and Slavery:
Confederate Perceptions of Their War Experiences**

James W. B. Paxton

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and
State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

Dr. Crandall Shifflett, Chairman
Dr. Peter Wallenstein
Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr.

June 19, 1997
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Republicanism, Civil War, Confederate States Army, Confederate Soldiers,
Desertion

Fighting for Independence and Slavery:
Confederate Perceptions of Their War Experiences
by
James Paxton

(ABSTRACT)

It is striking that many white southerners enthusiastically went to war in 1861, and that within four years a large number of them became apathetic or even openly hostile toward the Confederacy. By far, nonslaveholders composed the greatest portion of the disaffected. This work interprets the Confederate war experience within a republican framework in order to better understand how such a drastic shift in opinion could take place.

Southern men fought for highly personal reasons--to protect their own liberty, independence, and to defend the rough equality between white men. They believed the Confederacy was the best guarantor of these ideals. Southerners' experiences differed widely from their expectations. White men perceived the war as an assault against their dominance and equality. The military was no protector of individual rights. The army expected recruits to conform to military discipline and standards. Officers oversaw their men's behavior and physically punished those who broke the rules. Southerners believed they were treated in a servile manner. Legislation from Richmond brought latent class tensions to the surface, making it clear to nonslaveholders that they were not the planters' equals. Wives, left alone to care for their families, found it difficult to live in straitened times. Increasingly, women challenged the patriarchal order by stepped outside of traditional gender roles to care for their families.

Wartime changes left many men feeling confused and emasculated. Southerners, who willingly fought the Yankees to defend their freedoms, turned against the Confederacy when it encroached upon their independence. Many withdrew their support from the war. Some hid crops from impressment agents or refused to enlist, while others actually or symbolically attacked the planter elite or deserted.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	iv
Chapter	
Introduction	1
1. The South on the Eve of War	5
2. "You Want to Make a Damned Slave of Me": The Character of Southern Soldiers	15
3. "My Mind Is Always So Torn Up"	27
4. The Confederate Government Opens Class Divisions	37
5. "O! If I Were Only a Man": Gender and the War	45
Conclusion: Desertion and the Vanishing Confederacy	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY	63
VITA	72

Acknowledgments

Many people have helped make this potentially stressful endeavor most enjoyable. I would like to thank the members of my committee for directing this thesis. Professor Crandall Shifflett, the chairman, and Professors Peter Wallenstein, and James I. Robertson, Jr. forced me to focus, clarify, and rethink my ideas. Special mention must go to Professors Shifflett and Wallenstein who were especially encouraging, patient, and helpful throughout the entire process. I cannot thank them enough. The beginnings of this thesis go back to an undergraduate paper I wrote under Professor Bruce White at the University of Toronto. At Virginia Polytech, Professor Neil Larry Shumsky saw the potential of the topic before I did, and encouraged me to pursue it.

Although not everyone in my family shares my love of southern history, they have always encouraged and supported my interests. Ever since I can remember Mom and Dad took me on long trips so I could visit forts, battlefields, and museums. My office is well stocked with books from those trips. Whenever I am home Jon and Jane read, discuss, and question my work. Some of the present work has developed from those conversations.

Irene will never get enough credit. Despite the problems involved in moving to a new country she has been supportive, patient, and loving throughout. She has uncomplainingly read more drafts than anyone else. Her sharp pencil gave shape to the final product.

List of Abbreviations

DU	Manuscript Collection, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.
FSNMP	Fredericksburg-Spotsylvania National Military Park, Fredericksburg, Va.
LC	Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
<i>O. R.</i>	United States War Department. <i>The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies</i> . 70 volumes; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901.
SHC	Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.
VPI	Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Va.