

**Won, but Not One:  
The Construction of Union Veteranhood, 1861-1917**

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**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**

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**1 May 2017  
Blacksburg, Virginia**

**Keywords: Civil War; Union; Veterans; The Grand Army of the Republic; *The National Tribune*;  
The Arrears Act; Status**

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**Abstract**

Fifteen years following the end of the American Civil War, the identity of the Union veteran was in crisis. In 1879 Congress passed the Arrears Act, an immediately expensive pension bill that muddied the public's perception of veterans. Once considered heroes, the former soldiers of the Civil War became drains on the federal budget. At the same time, the membership of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Union veterans' organization, was increasing exponentially, making visible veterans commonplace. No longer was the Union veteran rare and honorable; by the 1880s the veteran was common and expensive. In response to the degradation of veteranhood, some former soldiers felt the blanket term "veteran" needed to be reconsidered. These men went about creating the identity of "true" veteranhood in an attempt to reclaim the level of status attached to veterans immediately following the Civil War. Not all veterans were accepting of this "true" veteranhood, and actively fought back, forwarding instead a notion of inclusive veteranhood in which all former soldiers were represented. Neither side proved convincing to the other, and the debate only ended in the early twentieth century as Union veterans died off and new veterans took their place. Through this debate, though, we can see the importance and complexity attached to identities, and the ways in which people actively reconsider themselves to cling to these identities in response to changes in their surroundings.

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**General Audience Abstract**

Following the American Civil War, veterans of the Union army faced numerous threats to their status as heroes, such as the expense of their pension program, and the sheer number of veterans living in America in the post-war period. In response to these threats, a number of former Union soldiers attempted to create a new status group within veteranhood, which they referred to as a “true veteran.” By defining “true” veteranhood with specific requirements, such as an early enlistment date, these veterans hoped to regain their status as saviors of the nation. This status group was contested, however, as the majority of Union veterans battled against this idea of exclusive veteranhood. Though neither side ceded to the other, the public was largely unaccepting of this true/untrue dichotomy, and the “true” veterans ultimately lost the war of public opinion.

## **Acknowledgments**

I could not have completed this project without the tremendous support provided by my thesis committee, Dr. Paul Quigley, Dr. Kathleen Jones, and Dr. David Cline. Each of you pushed me in different but equally fruitful ways, and the project would be far less interesting without your influence. Thank you for all of the time you spent reading over my many drafts, and for the comments you sent my way, you never ceased to amaze me with the quality of your insight. To Dr. Quigley especially, thank you for the numerous ways you have helped me develop as a scholar. From inviting me to present at the Reconciliation after Civil Wars Conference, to introducing me to a number of renowned Civil War historians, including my PhD advisor Dr. Caroline E. Janney, I owe being where I am to you. The success of this project is due to my committee, the errors are my own, though it is thanks to them that there are far fewer than there were originally.

This project was also aided by the wonderful history community at Virginia Tech. The faculty at Virginia Tech outside of my committee still found ways to lend a helping hand in guiding my research along. Dr. Richard Hirsch, Dr. Melanie Kiechle, Dr. Dennis Halpin, Dr. Helen Schneider, Dr. Peter Wallenstein, and numerous others, thank you for willingness to listen, and for your eagerness to guide me in the right direction; you helped keep this work fun. To my cohort, thank you for putting up with me these past two years, I'll never forget all of the times we shared. A big thank you needs to go to Ricky and Brooke Mullins, you made Blacksburg feel like home. Best wishes to both of you as you continue your careers in academia. I owe a great debt to Faith Skiles for her unending patience and her genuine desire to help. I also want to thank those who keep the department running, Linda Fountaine, Brianna Crowder, Courtney Loan,

Clara Enriquez, and Amanda Swindell, the support you all provided was immeasurable. I will be lost without you!

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support, and their seemingly inexhaustible ability to convincingly feign interest in my thesis research. To my mother and father, Kathleen and Thomas Caprice, thank you for supporting me in almost everything I do; the one exception being that time I wanted to quit school during the third grade. You two have always been my unfair advantage. To my brothers, Cory and Casey Caprice, thank you for setting a high bar, and always pushing me to be better. And, of course, for using your lucrative careers to sponsor my future research. To my grandparents, Walter and Cecilia Caprice, and Patricia Davis, thank you for doing what all wonderful grandparents do: providing me with an undue level of confidence, and always telling me I am better than I actually am! Lastly, I would like to thank my girlfriend, Chloe Cogavin, and her wonderful family, Michael, Donna, Sergio, Zach, Rory, and, of course, Sean, for being a constant source of positivity. Chloe had the unenviable tasks of trying to explain my thesis to her family and friends, guiding me through New York City while visiting archives, and so much more. I could not have done it without you. It is to all of these amazing people that I dedicate this work, thank you all.

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## **Introduction**

## I. Becoming Veterans

On May 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of 1865, approximately 150,000 soldiers marched through Washington D.C., taking part in the Grand Review of the Armies at the end of the Civil War. By a little after three in the afternoon on May 24<sup>th</sup>, the march, and with it the Grand Review, had ended. During the Grand Review, large crowds of citizens cheered on every man marching, all in celebration of the ending of the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> 150,000 men made their transition into veteranhood as one inclusive body; they were victors. Two years prior, however, the soldier's path to veteranhood had been far different. During the winter of 1863, when a large number of enlistments were due to end, the United States War Department turned the mustering out procedure into a divisive and demeaning procedure. The United States War Department labeled the men who refused to reenlist as "non-veterans," damaging their post-war status.<sup>2</sup> Just as men transitioned from soldiers to veterans under drastically different circumstances, men also came to understand veteranhood in different and distinct ways. This thesis will analyze the processes through which veterans came to conceptualize their service, and the service of others.

After four long years of fighting, the nation was ready for the Civil War to come to a close. The war had destroyed more land, property, and bodies than any previous American conflict. During the Grand Review, the Armies of the Potomac, Georgia, and Tennessee, as well as civilians within a train ride of Washington D.C., had their chance to publicly celebrate the war finally coming to a close. Between 50,000 and 100,000 citizens poured into the capital to watch the troops march through the city. Just as the cheering crowds were celebrating the ending of the

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<sup>1</sup> Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 7-13.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1987), 263.

war, they were also witnessing these 150,000 soldiers make their two-mile march from soldier to veteran. For these men, the Grand Review was the finish line at the end of their journey as soldiers; a few weeks after the Review they returned to their old lives, citizens once again.<sup>3</sup>

The group of men present during the Grand Review was relatively homogenous. The soldiers who marched in the Review made up only a fraction of the total number of men still in Union armies, approximately 150,000 out of over 1,000,000 active soldiers, and the approximately 2,000,000 total number of men who served.<sup>4</sup> All of the soldiers in the armies present at the Review were white. The United States Colored Troops regiments had been consolidated and assigned to the Army of the James in 1864, and were stationed too far away to join in the march.<sup>5</sup> Though a unified celebration of very similar men, the Review did include some friendly competition between armies. After marching on the second day of the Review, John Hill Ferguson of the 10<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry was delighted to see that “The paper speaks very highly of our review and acknowledges [sic]... that Sherman’s Army went far ahead of the Army of the Potomac.”<sup>6</sup> The two-day march into veteranhood was certainly not without gamesmanship, but above all the tone was one of unity and victory. Not all mustering out during the Civil War struck this same tone of unity. Mustering out during the conflict could be quite divisive.

In his book, *Embattled Courage*, Gerald F. Linderman describes a moment in late 1863 when a large number of Union soldiers who enlisted in 1861 were set to complete their service and leave the army. In order to convince the men to reenlist, the Army command offered a

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<sup>3</sup> Gallagher, *The Union War*, 7-13.

<sup>4</sup> Gallagher, *The Union War*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Gallagher, *The Union War*, 9. It should be noted that there were African Americans present during the second day of the Grand Review, but they were laborers that accompanied Sherman’s army, not United States Colored Troops.

<sup>6</sup> Gallagher, *The Union War*, 14.

number of benefits to the men, including an extra bounty and a thirty-day furlough. Most interesting of these benefits, however, was “an offer to bestow on those who remained in the service the title ‘veteran volunteer,’ a measure whose attractive power rested in its ability formally to distinguish the 1861-1862 volunteers from the 1863-1864 conscripts and bounty soldiers.”<sup>7</sup> At what could have been one of the largest musterings out of the conflict, the U.S. War Department co-opted the division between early-enlisted soldiers and later-enlisted soldiers to keep the army together. By playing to this discord between soldiers, Army command was stressing the value of being connected to an earlier enlistment date. If the various carrots offered by Army command were not enough, they also included a stick: “Where it could, the Union Army mixed its inducements with an assortment of pressures. . . . Those who chose to serve out their terms [and not reenlist] were to be called, most unfairly, ‘non-veterans.’”<sup>8</sup> With this new “non-veteran” classification, the War Department *created* a new division amongst the soldiers, with the focus on muster out date as opposed to enlistment date.

Exploiting the division between soldiers was not restricted to the orders surrounding the 1863 reenlistment effort. Far from a merely top-down directive, soldiers adopted this “non-veteran” nomenclature in their own writing. In the history of his Thirty-Third Indiana regiment, John R. McBride described his work completing the paperwork mustering men out, writing “The muster-out rolls were completed by the 19<sup>th</sup>, and on that date Captain Beecher mustered out one

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<sup>7</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 262. This distinction between a man who enlisted in 1861-1862 and a man who enlisted in 1863-1864 was key, as there was a stigma surrounding late-enlistment. The later-enlisted man received a large bounty to enlist in the military, which caused people to question whether it was greed, instead of patriotism, that drove men into the war after 1862.

<sup>8</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 263.

hundred and forty-three non-veterans.”<sup>9</sup> McBride was not alone in adopting the term “non-veteran.” In his diary, Alexander G. Downing described a similar mustering out. Downing wrote, “The non-veterans of the Eleventh and Thirteenth Iowa Regiments were mustered out this morning, and left for Chattanooga, from which place they will start home.”<sup>10</sup> As these men show, this gloomier mustering out process had far different results than the Grand Review. Rather than inspiring unity, this muster out bred disunity. Veterans who reenlisted used the term “non-veteran” to reinforce their distinction from the men heading home, and the higher status that came with seeing the war until its conclusion. The desire for status in soldiers and veterans, both inherent and created, would develop beyond the Winter of ’63.

In the years following the Civil War, the quest for status ebbed and flowed with the perceived public prestige of the veteran. During the two days of the Grand Review, the crowd roared loudly enough and the wreaths piled high enough that there was enough status to go around. But, the years passed, and the crowds disappeared. As memory of the war faded, the adulation and praise the public felt toward soldiers and veterans in 1865 turned into frustration. Veterans became recognized more as an economic burden than as glorious victors. As the costs of veteran pensions grew in the late 1870s, the popular image of the veteran degraded from hero to beggar. When times grew dire, some veterans responded as they did in the winter of ’63, by emphasizing distinction. By the late nineteenth century, Union veterans faced a crisis of status and responded with an attempt to create a hierarchy of veteranhood. Certain veterans began using the term “true” veteran, presenting themselves as being separate from the beggars, and

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<sup>9</sup> John R. McBride, *History of the Thirty-Third Indiana Veteran Volunteer Infantry During the Four Years of the Civil War from Sept. 16, 1861, to July 21, 1865* (Indianapolis, IN: WM. B. Buford, Printer and Binder, 1900), 143.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander G. Downing, *Downing’s Civil War Diary*, ed. Olynthus B. Clark (Des Moines, IA: The Historical Department of Iowa, 1916), 223.

worthy of the praise and awe that the term “veteran” once inspired. Not all veterans, however, were willing to accept this hierarchy. Certain veterans, such as those in the leadership of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), emphasized inclusive and united veteranhood, likely in an effort to expand the visibility of veterans and the political influence of the veteran favoring Republican party. The support of inclusivity and unity among these veterans struck a tone far closer to that of the Grand Review than of the Winter of ‘63.

This thesis aims to complicate our understanding of Union veteranhood. The standard approach to veteranhood, both generally and within the current historiography of the Civil War, is that of an objective classification: to be a veteran meant having been a soldier or a sailor in the Civil War. This thesis argues that veteranhood was far more complex than an objective classification, and that Union veterans understood their service in different and often competing ways. The following chapters will address the conversation, spurred on by rising pension costs during the late 1870s, surrounding the construction of Union veteranhood. These chapters will address the two broad themes that emerge, exclusion and inclusion. Exclusion is the focus of Chapter One. This chapter examines the ways in which certain veterans attempted to establish a hierarchy within veteranhood by constructing a higher status category, frequently referred to as a “true” veteran. Inclusion is at the center of Chapter Two. This chapter analyzes the response from various veterans and veterans’ organizations to the veteran hierarchy, and their aim to maintain veteranhood as an inclusive identity. Through this study, it becomes clear that the subjective nature of veteranhood ensured that a consensus over an accepted veteranhood could never be reached, and the argument over veteranhood would only subside during the early twentieth century, when the number of Union veterans had decreased, and the waging of new wars vastly expanded the veteran class.

This thesis shows that veteranhood as a category was constructed to fit the needs of post-war soldiers. For Civil War veterans, their identity and manhood was connected to their service as soldiers, while their economic survival was connected to their pension benefits as veterans. As the memory of the war faded, and public opinion of the veterans deteriorated, veterans feared all they won in war was in jeopardy, and reacted either by pulling together or pulling apart. This study of Civil War veterans should lead us to examine how veterans of other wars and other times also constructed the meaning of their identity, and to what end.

## II. Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is informed by the theory of the social construction of identity as well as Murray Milner, Jr.'s general theory of status relations. Though often in the background, these theories help to provide a scaffold for the questions driving this work: *how* and *why* did former soldiers define their identity as veterans? Broadly, social construction aids our understanding of *how* veterans constructed a conception of their own service, and the service of others. Social construction in this context means that veteranhood was not a universal identity. Instead, multiple parties, including veterans and civilians, constructed the veteran identity by debating what it meant to be a veteran *beyond* having served in the military. Through constructing a more complex understanding of veteranhood, veterans created a system in which there could be stratification. Milner's theory on status relations suggests *why* veterans felt said stratification was desirable. This section will first address the *why*, and then examine the *how*, as the *why* helped determine the *how* of constructing the Union veteran.

Milner originally crafted his general theory of status relations to analyze the caste system of India, but the theory, in general terms, is applicable to this study. In his book, *Status and Sacredness: A General Theory of Status Relations and an Analysis of Indian Culture*, Milner identifies two key aspects of status relations: that status conveys nonmaterial resources, and that status is a finite resource. Milner builds from the Weberian tradition of emphasizing the “significance of nonmaterial resources and types of social formations other than social class.”<sup>11</sup> The type of social formation that Milner focuses on is social status, and the nonmaterial resource of symbolic capital that accompanies social status.<sup>12</sup> Other social scientists, such as Steven L. Blader and Ya-Ru Chen, authors of “What’s in a Name? Status, Power, and Other Forms of Social Hierarchy,” provide an understanding of status similar to Milner’s. Blader and Chen write: “The emerging consensus among many status researchers is to define social status as the prestige, respect, and esteem that a party has in the eyes of others.”<sup>13</sup> These ideas of social status will be applied in this thesis to Union veterans, who made up what sociologist Max Weber would refer to as a “social group.”<sup>14</sup> Social groups are “social formations based on common social honor and status (rooted in accumulated approvals and disapprovals).”<sup>15</sup> As was apparent in the Grand Review, many soldiers began their lives as veterans with crowds of spectators cheering

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<sup>11</sup> Murray Milner, Jr., *Status and Sacredness: A General Theory of Status Relations and an Analysis of Indian Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>12</sup> For an example of what Milner means by social status and the accompanying symbolic capital, consider for instance the different way in which one might a visit from the President of the United States as opposed to a visit from one’s neighbor. The status and symbolic capital that are attached to the office of the President of the United States would make one far more amenable to any requests made by the President than by one’s neighbor.

<sup>13</sup> Steven L. Blader and Ya-Ru Chen, “What’s in a Name? Status, Power, and Other Forms of Social Hierarchy,” in *The Psychology of Social Status*, ed. Joey T. Cheng, Jessica L. Tracy, Cameron Anderson (New York, NY: Springer, 2014), 74.

<sup>14</sup> Milner, *Status and Sacredness*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Milner, *Status and Sacredness*, 28.

them on and adorning them with flowers. A massive accumulation of approval is rarely so visible.

Status, however, is a limited resource. As Milner explains, “The amount of status available to a group is relatively inexpansive. Stated another way, status is a relatively zero-sum or positional resource . . . If a hundred Nobel Peace Prizes were awarded annually, each prize would be much less prestigious.”<sup>16</sup> Status accompanies rarity. When applied to the Union veteran, then, status becomes problematic. Union veterans struggled because Union veterans were not a rarity. After the final muster-out of the Civil War in 1865, over two million Union veterans lived in the United States. When including former Confederates, the number of veterans totaled three million.<sup>17</sup> For context, the population of the United States was 31,443,321 people in 1860, and 39,818,449 people in 1870, so in 1865 the population was likely in the range of 35,000,000 people.<sup>18</sup> Considering this population estimate, approximately one in every eighteen people was a Union veteran, or one in every nine males when excluding females. At over two million members directly after the war, Union veterans were a large status group. Initially, however, rarity was not an issue. In the wake of winning the Civil War and preserving the Union, the public appreciation towards the veterans was so large that their numbers did not prohibit each man from attaining status. The status of a Union veteran carried symbolic capital, regardless of group size. The level of symbolic capital would wane, however, when the government program

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<sup>16</sup> Milner, *Status and Sacredness*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart McConnell, “Who Joined the Grand Army? Three Case Studies in the Construction of Union Veteranhood, 1866-1900,” in *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays*, ed. Maris A. Vinovskis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 139.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “1860 U.S. Federal Census – Population,” <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>.  
U.S. Census Bureau, “1870 U.S. Federal Census – Population,” <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>.

that supplied pensions to veterans expanded, and became more and more expensive. By the 1880s, the public no longer saw veterans as service providers, but as service consumers, and their consumption had grown to untenable levels.

If we apply Milner's theory of social relations to this case study, we see that in the late nineteenth century, Union veterans faced a crisis of status. In response to this crisis, a contingent of Union veterans constructed a hierarchy within veteranhood, with the underlying idea that "true veteranhood" existed. The goal of "true" veteranhood was to convince the public that the higher status group, i.e., men who enlisted earlier and served longer, deserved the lion's share of the reward, ranging from pension payments to public praise. With Milner's work in mind, proponents of "true" veteranhood were aiming to retain the status and accompanying rewards, reaping pensions, by reducing the number of veterans who could fully claim the veteran identity.

Because status is relatively inexhaustible, an increase of the number in the social group corresponds to an equal decrease in the symbolic capital available to each member. As Milner explains it, "Since status can be expanded only to a limited degree, in status groups most mobility is circulation mobility. If any significant number of people move up, a similar number must be demoted, or the overall status of the group will be eroded."<sup>19</sup> According to this principle, the opposite must also be true. By reducing the number in the social group, there is a correlating increase in the symbolic capital available to each remaining member. This theory undergirds the construction of the "true" veteran distinction. If the number of men recognized as "true" veterans were reduced, and their valor established, the share of status for each remaining man would increase. While death was certainly helping to decrease the number of veterans, it did not seem

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<sup>19</sup> Milner, *Status and Sacredness*, 34.

to sufficiently reduce the number of those in the status group of veteranhood until the early twentieth century.

The usefulness of this theory to explain the appearance of “true” veteranhood in the 1880s is exemplified in the life of Albert Woolson, the longest surviving Union veteran. Woolson enlisted in 1864 as a mere drummer boy. His veteran status was of little note, that is, until around the mid-twentieth century, when he was one of a handful of Union veterans still living. By 1953 Woolson was the last of them, and by this time he was a national celebrity, with newspapers from around the country writing numerous articles about him. Today a statue dedicated to Woolson stands at the Civil War battlefield of Gettysburg, a battle in which he did not participate, honoring him as the Union veteran.<sup>20</sup>

With this understanding of *why* certain Union veterans constructed categories of veteranhood, we can return to *how* veteranhood was constructed. In their work *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman posit that people can create and curate an identity through a process of social construction, a process of repeated discussion of an idea until that idea need only a name and no longer needs to be defined.<sup>21</sup> Social construction stands in contrast to universalist, essentialist definitions of identity. In the case of veteranhood, a universalist, essentialist would define a veteran as a person who served in the military. By looking at veteranhood from a social constructionist standpoint, however, it becomes clear that the meanings of veteranhood are complicated by issues of status and resources, and, as will be seen in chapter one, the context of post-war economics and politics. The process of social

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<sup>20</sup> Curt Brown, “The Last Civil War Vet Called Duluth Home,” *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), August 7, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1996), 132-134.

construction is of utmost importance to this work, as it is through this process that we can understand *how* one sector of Union veterans attempted to create “true” veteranhood, while another segment attempted to combat “true” veteranhood.

### III. Source Base

In their work, “Discourse and Identity Construction,” Bamberg, De Fina, and Schriffrin suggest studying identity “as constructed in discourse, as negotiated among speaking subjects in social contexts, and as emerging in the form of subjectivity and a sense of self.”<sup>22</sup> A study of veteranhood elucidates this model. To find public veteran discourse, this thesis looks primarily to newspaper publications. The term “true veteran” can be found in newspapers across the country during this period, especially in the veteran newspaper *The National Tribune*. Men who wrote to the *Tribune* used the term “true veteran” as a way to either claim status, or to criticize others. The use of “true” veteranhood established the hierarchical separation among veterans. In the same publications, other men wrote to combat the idea of “true” veteranhood. Their discourse instead constructed an alternative, inclusive identity of veteranhood in which all former soldiers were equal as veterans. Veteranhood was a badge of service any who served could claim.

Bamberg, De Fina, and Schriffrin argue that “the process of active engagement in the construction of identity ... takes place and is continuously practiced in everyday, mundane situations, where it is open to be observed and studied.”<sup>23</sup> For this thesis, the everyday

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Bamberg, Anna De Fina, and Deborah Schriffrin, “Discourse and Identity Construction,” in *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, ed. S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, and V. L. Vignoles (New York, NY: Springer, 2011), 178.

<sup>23</sup> Bamberg, “Discourse and Identity Construction,” 178.

expressions were found in newspapers like *The National Tribune*. Discourse surrounding “True” veteranhood and the denial of “true” veteranhood was performative; veterans were attempting to establish these exclusive and inclusive identities within the public sphere. With this performative aspect in mind, it was necessary then for the construction of these identities to take place in public in order to reach their target audience. *The National Tribune* was the most popular veteran newspaper, and was the venue where many conversations about the meanings of veteranhood took place. Though the editors of the *Tribune*, favored an inclusive approach to veteranhood, they were willing to publish letters from a variety of different viewpoints. Because veterans could publish their opinions on both sides of the debate, *The National Tribune* provided the perfect venue for veteran debates. These debates inform the arguments of this thesis, and as a result *The National Tribune* makes up a large portion of its source base.

Beyond the *Tribune*, this work also includes news items from the popular press, as well as public speeches. Drawing from an array of civilian newspaper publications is useful in tracking the public’s response to the debate, as well as establishing when the conversation over veteranhood concluded.<sup>24</sup> Records of public events, such as Memorial or Decoration day speeches, or Grand Army of the Republic encampment speeches, also inform this work. This conversation over veteranhood appears to be absent in private works, such as letters or diaries, and therefore these types of sources are not included in this thesis. This absence is to be

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<sup>24</sup> *The National Tribune* ended its publication run in 1917, the same time this thesis argues the debate surrounding veteranhood ended. That these two events took place at the same time is not a coincidence. The debate ended due to a lack of veterans available to continue a debate, the same lack of veterans that ended the *Tribune*. In order to ensure this debate was not taking place elsewhere, I used the Library of Congress newspaper database *Chronicling America*. To search through the database for veteran debate, I used a variety of techniques: from reading through entire newspapers, to employing keyword searches such as “veteran,” “true veteran,” “genuine veteran,” “short service men,” “eleventh hour men,” and “bounties.” These searches revealed that the debate slowed following the turn of the twentieth century, and was non-existent by 1917.

expected, though, considering the performative nature of the conversation. Without an audience, the process of constructing a public identity had no value.

#### IV. Parameters of Study

This study begins in 1861, when men enlisted in the Union army and began their journey into veteranhood, and ends in 1917 with America's entrance into World War I and the end of *The National Tribune*. The conversation over "true" veteranhood had already begun to dissipate in the early years of the twentieth century, as fewer and fewer Union veterans were still alive to keep debating. Then, with the influx of World War I veterans and the end of the *Tribune*, discussion regarding which Union soldiers best personified veteranhood came to an end. This conversation, though, retained continuity throughout this period. Proponents of "true" veteranhood were never an organized group, but instead were typically voicing their own opinion. These proponents were numerous enough, however, to motivate opponents of their exclusionary "true" veteranhood, but again these opponents were not combating evolving arguments, and therefore their rebuttals were also consistent over time. Because of these continuities, this thesis approaches the arguments of exclusive and inclusive veteranhood thematically, rather than chronologically.

The subjects of this study are white males who publicly practiced their veteran identity, as veterans of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) are absent from the source base that makes up this study. When describing "true" veteranhood or inclusive veteranhood, the actors of this thesis do not mention black veterans, and I did not come across any examples of black veterans contributing to the discussion on their own behalf. While it is unclear why black

veterans were not contributing to this debate in the pages of the *Tribune*, the reason white veterans excluded them from their own writings is a little easier to deduce. The idea of “true” veteranhood was about distinguishing between men based on invisible factors; a veteran’s military service could not be ascertained ocularly by a random citizen. A veteran’s blackness, however, was visible. Due to the racial hierarchy present during the time period of this study, white veterans inhabited a higher status group than African American veterans by default as a result of the color of their skin. White veterans, therefore, did not feel the need to distinguish themselves from black veterans.

#### IV. Historiography

Veterans have rarely received specialized topical treatment by historians, and veteran studies occupies a somewhat amorphous place within the historiography of the Civil War. Until the early twenty-first century, the majority of Civil War studies that included veterans came through memory studies, and often focused on prominent veterans, such as former generals. These studies skewed heavily towards the memory of Confederate veterans as a result of historical interest in the Myth of the Lost Cause.<sup>25</sup> More recent works on Civil War memory,

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<sup>25</sup> The Lost Cause was a southern-skewed history of the Civil War in an effort to make the Confederate war one in which the South could take pride. Some of the tenets of the Lost Cause include shifting blame away from the Confederacy for their defeat, claiming it was an unwinnable war, and shifting the focus away from slavery and towards state’s rights. For overviews on the Lost Cause, see Gary Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), and Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1973). For examples of memory studies involving Confederate veterans see Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1973); Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-*

beginning with David W. Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001) brought Union veterans into the study. Blight argues that race played a key role in North and South reconciliation, as both sides focused on the heroism of white soldiers, while downplaying the role of African Americans and emancipation.<sup>26</sup> Still, in Blight's study, Union veterans are examined through the lens of reconciliation and their interaction with Confederate veterans. Blight is less interested in Union veterans' understandings of their own service. *Race and Reunion* looks at veteranhood as an "us vs. them," viewing Union veterans as a unified group. Caroline E. Janney's *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (2013) is a response to Blight's work on reconciliation. Janney examines Union veterans in their own context, arguing that Union veterans resisted reconciliation. Janney argues that Union veterans fought to defend their understanding of the Civil War, especially with regards to their role in ending slavery.<sup>27</sup> Though Civil War memory studies have shifted to

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1920 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987); Alan T. Nolan, *Lee Considered: General Robert E. Lee & Civil War History* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Gary Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory* (Baton Rouge, LA: University of Louisiana Press, 1998); Gary Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). Blight's main argument in this work, in simplified form, is that Union veterans were willing to accept the Southern memory of the Civil War, so long as southerners conceded that secession was not in accordance with United States Constitution. Blight argues that Northerners were willing to cede the true meaning of the war in an effort to allow for reconciliation between the North and the South.

<sup>27</sup> Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). Janney finds that Union veterans were far less willing to concede that the war was not about slavery than Blight suggests. Instead, Janney finds that at Civil War reunion events Union veterans remembered with pride that they fought to free the slaves. Other reconsiderations of Blight's work include Keith M. Harris *Across the Bloody Chasm: The Culture of Commemoration Among Civil War Veterans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), which argues along the same line as Janney.

include Union veterans, the number of works focused solely on Union memory of the Civil War still pales in comparison to the number of works examining Confederate memory.

In a relatively recent trend, Civil War historiography is turning towards the study of veterans *outside* the realm of memory studies. Eric T. Dean was one of the first historians to investigate the lives of veterans after the Civil War in his 1997 work, *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War*.<sup>28</sup> Dean's work compares the postwar lives of Vietnam veterans to the postwar lives of Civil War veterans, and finds striking similarities. Dean argues that Civil War veterans struggled to reacclimate to civilian life in the post-war United States, far more so than historians had previously thought. Dean's work began a trend that historians such as Brian Matthew Jordan and James Marten continued.<sup>29</sup> Jordan and Marten expand upon Dean's earlier work, studying the public's relationship with Union war veterans, and the way this relationship quickly became strained as veterans were seen as a financial burden to the United States. Though groundbreaking in their study of veteran-citizen relations, their binary framework portrays Union veterans as a homogeneous group. Stuart McConnell's social history of Union veteranhood, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-*

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<sup>28</sup> Eric T. Dean, *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Brian Matthew Jordan, *Marching Home: Union Veterans and Their Unending Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014), and James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011). Barbara A. Gannon's *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011) also deals with Union veterans, but her work focuses more on the heretofore unknown relationship between black and white Union veterans in the Grand Army of the Republic. Gannon argues against the previously accepted notion that black veterans were excluded from the memory of the Civil War, and finds that instead black and white Union veterans shared Grand Army of the Republic posts, and memory of black service during the war was not suppressed. Gannon finds that the "us vs. them" dichotomy typically assumed between black and white veterans was far less prevalent than previously thought.

1900, uses a similar frame. McConnell studies the membership of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the largest Union veteran's organization, probing the motivations of veterans who did and did not join the GAR. In this study, though, McConnell ultimately strays little from the "us vs. them" understanding of Union veterans. McConnell concludes that the Grand Army was a refuge for veterans weary of a country they no longer recognized.<sup>30</sup>

Deconstruction of the veteran community is rare within Civil War historiography. General Civil War histories often recognize two groups of *soldiers*--men who enlisted early and men who enlisted late--but one group of *veterans*. Some of the popularized histories of the Civil War, such as James M. McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* and Bruce Catton's *A Stillness at Appomattox*, deride later-enlisters as less than the soldiers who enlisted at the war's outset, and have described them as being unworthy of study.<sup>31</sup> That such a distinction existed between soldiers *during* the Civil War begs the question of how these soldiers reconciled their differences *after* the Civil War as veterans. This thesis adds to the current historiography of the Civil War by tracking that division from soldierhood to veteranhood. Rather than examining

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<sup>30</sup> Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956). Other works that share this opinion of later enlisted soldiers include Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), a deep consideration of how soldiers dealt with the experience of combat, and Ella Lonn, *Desertion During the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1928), which is the most comprehensive study to date on desertion during the Civil War. Other studies ignore late enlisters altogether, such as James M. McPherson *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), ix, as McPherson all but ignores "Union soldiers who enlisted in 1863-64 for large bounties," as he is "less interested in the motives of skulkers who did their best to avoid combat." Kenneth Noe's *Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) is a response to this absence of later enlisted soldiers within studies of the Civil War. Though Noe's focus was on Confederate soldiers, Union soldiers would benefit from a similar treatment.

Union veterans as a singular group, this thesis argues that the differences noted between soldiers during the war did not disappear in 1865, or in the years following, but in fact, would serve to divide Union veterans into the twentieth century. Through this study, we can see how war affects the identities of those who wage it. Identity forged during war becomes so hardened that threats to that identity could serve to splinter men allied during the war into adversaries during the peace.

**Chapter I**  
**Exclusive Veteranhood:**  
**Constructing the “True” Veteran**

## I. What Was “True” Veteranhood?

On May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1884, Theodore C. Bacon, a veteran of the 17<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Cavalry, took the stage at a Decoration day event in Canandaigua, New York, and, in front of the Albert M. Murray post of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), he lambasted men he did not consider worthy of the title “veteran.” During this speech, Bacon addressed a number of issues he had with the state of Union veteranhood, specifically regarding the stigma pensions were giving veterans. Throughout his speech, Bacon subtly defined veteranhood as existing in two classes or status groups, the “true” veterans, and the veterans with less claim to status. It was this second group, according to Bacon, who were responsible for any deeds unbecoming of a veteran. In his speech in front of an audience of veterans, Bacon did explicitly what many other veterans did during this period; he constructed a hierarchy of veteranhood in which one group was deserving of praise, while the other was responsible for the negative press plaguing veteranhood. It was through the implementation of this hierarchy that “true” veterans policed the boundaries of veteranhood. Bacon’s speech requires in-depth study because, while other veterans would perform their own construction of “true” veteranhood, few were as rhetorically gifted as Bacon. Bacon’s speech provides us with a clear example of how “true” veterans went about constructing their own superior class of veteranhood.

Bacon began his address by praising the men who enlisted at the first opportunity, saying “Our great war commenced with a sublime outburst of patriotic fervor. By the hundred thousand, the best of our young men rushed to meet the country’s enemy, asking nothing.”<sup>32</sup> By

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<sup>32</sup> “Cincinnatus or Belisarius—Which?,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), October 25, 1886. Though Bacon’s speech was originally delivered in 1884, it was reprinted in 1886 in this article, along with a reaction from the article’s author.

emphasizing that the best of their young men enlisted out of patriotism, and required no monetary reward to do so, Bacon implicitly created a group of contrasting men who enlisted late and required payment to do so. Bacon then decried the inferiority of the lesser group, claiming that “before the war was ended, this generous glow of self-sacrifice had cooled, and how our depleted ranks were filled by the purchase in open market, at prices rising to a height that almost staggered belief, *of things called men* ... As far as was possible, there was eliminated from the transactions of enlistment—from the idea of military service—the sentiment of patriotism or duty.”<sup>33</sup> According to Bacon, this shift in recruitment “was one which cost the country more than can ever be counted ... it demoralized our armies, lost our battles, depraved the public sentiment and burdened nations, states, counties and towns with prodigious accumulations of indebtedness.”<sup>34</sup> The way in which Bacon described the change in the recruits made it abundantly clear to all the veterans listening that day that the problem he was pinpointing was the Enrollment Act of 1863, which citizens ubiquitously despised throughout the North during the Civil War.<sup>35</sup> For proponents of “true” veteranhood, the Enrollment Act of 1863 would serve as a major dividing line between veterans; those who enlisted before this date were “true,” those who enlisted after were not.

On March 3, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Enrollment Act into law, allowing the War Department to conscript men into three-year infantry terms. The Enrollment Act was a pivotal moment for the Union war effort. Union recruitment had begun to slow in the

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<sup>33</sup> “Cincinnatus or Belisarius—Which?,” October 25, 1886.

<sup>34</sup> “Cincinnatus or Belisarius—Which?,” October 25, 1886.

<sup>35</sup> Historian James McPherson describes the Enrollment Act of 1863 as working “with such inefficiency, corruption, and perceived injustice that it became one of the most divisive issues of the war and served as a model of how *not* to conduct a draft in future wars.” James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 600.

summer of 1862. Lincoln's July 1862 call for troops went only partially answered. Moreover, the war losses accrued by Union armies were outstripping the rate at which the Union recruiting machine could replenish them with fresh men. Those in the United States had expected a quick war in 1861, but had since learned that the Civil War would not be quick. When the war proved to be long, and casualty rates high, fewer men were willing to fight. Lincoln and the entire federal government recognized that enrollment was dropping, and responded with the Enrollment Act.

The Enrollment Act required all men eligible for military service to enroll for conscription, the same process as registering for a draft. In order to make regulating the enrollment process more efficient, the Enrollment Act declared that "the United States shall be divided into districts" that were to be determined by the President and Congress.<sup>36</sup> This efficiency provision was also heralded as a means to aid in "the arrest of deserters and spies of the enemy."<sup>37</sup> This passage would prove to be an excellent bit of foresight, as deserters became a problem that the Union armies dealt with for the remainder of the war. Desertion would be inextricably linked to the reputation of the later-enlisted men.

Unlike a draft, the Enrollment Act was never intended to conscript troops directly into the Union armies. Rather, the act was intended to serve as motivation for men to volunteer on their own. The idea was that if men were forced into the army through conscription, rather than volunteering, their peers would see them as cowards. In order to abate this risk, men could enlist

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<sup>36</sup> Congress, "The Enrollment Act of 1863: An Act for Enrolling and Calling Out the National Forces and Other Purposes, March 3, 1863," *Congressional Record*. 37th Cong. 3d. Sess. Ch. 74, 75. 1863.

<sup>37</sup> Congress, "The Enrollment Act of 1863."

on their own accord.<sup>38</sup> True to its intended purpose, the Enrollment Act did not directly supply many troops. Only around two percent of the soldiers who served in the Union armies did so as a direct result of conscription.<sup>39</sup>

Though intended as a scare tactic, a threat against the manhood of men unwilling to volunteer, the Enrollment Act did have teeth in the event that Lincoln's calls for volunteers went unmet. First, President Lincoln would make a general call for soldiers, with an attached quota for each individual state. If after fifty days the quota went unfulfilled, the draft would go into effect until each district's quota was satisfied.<sup>40</sup> Under the Enrollment Act, Lincoln made four draft calls, one in October 1863, one in March 1864, one in July 1864, and one in December 1864.<sup>41</sup>

Included in the Enrollment Act were two ways for men who were drafted to avoid having to serve in the military, and they both involved money. Perhaps the easier of the two was commutation. If a man was drafted into military service, he needed only to pay a three-hundred-dollar commutation fee, and he was exempted from service.<sup>42</sup> If a man paid a commutation fee after being drafted in the first call for troops in October 1863, he was exempt from service for three years; if a man paid a commutation fee after being drafted in the second call for troops, in

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<sup>38</sup> Eugene Converse Murdock, *Patriotism Limited, 1862-1865: The Civil War Draft and the Bounty System* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1967), 10.

<sup>39</sup> Timothy J. Perri, "The Economics of US Civil War Conscription," *American Law and Economics Review* Vol. 10, No. 2 (Fall 2008), 429.

<sup>40</sup> Congress, "The Enrollment Act of 1863."

<sup>41</sup> Murdock, *Patriotism Limited*, 13. For an in-depth analysis of the draft during the Civil War, see James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> Congress, "The Enrollment Act of 1863." In the early 1860s, three-hundred-dollars was around the average wages a workingman could hope to earn in a year, meaning that this amount was likely unaffordable to the average citizen, or, if it was affordable, it put an enormous strain on their finances.

March 1864, he was only exempted from that particular draft. If a man did not wish to pay a commutation fee, he could pay a bounty to a substitute to take his place in the military. Before February 24, 1864, anyone could become a substitute, even men already enrolled. After February 24<sup>th</sup>, however, substitutes could only come from the pool of men exempted from military service.<sup>43</sup> This pool specifically contained men of improper age, younger than twenty or older than forty-five, thirty-five if married; those whom a doctor had deemed unfit for service, physically or mentally; those whom the government considered too valuable in their current position, such as the only son of an infirm parent; and finally those whom the government deemed unfit morally to serve in the army, such as the man who had been convicted of a felony, and immigrants who had not yet declared their intent to naturalize.<sup>44</sup>

After the second call for troops, in the Spring of 1864, an amendment was added to the Enrollment Act banning commutation, with the exception of those who were conscientious objectors.<sup>45</sup> Without commutation, drafted men saw their options for avoiding service dwindle to finding a substitute. As a result, substitution bounty prices rapidly inflated, eventually ballooning to over one thousand dollars. In his speech, Bacon lamented that prices like these encouraged the wrong type of men to enlist, men “whose bodily conformation would pass the surgeon’s scrutiny; *of objects vomited forth by the penitentiary or cast off as scum and dregs by foreign nations.*”<sup>46</sup> In Bacon’s estimation, big bounty men did not deserve to be considered “true” veterans, as they brought to the status of veteranhood an impure character coupled with an impure motive for joining.

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<sup>43</sup> Perri, “The Economics of US Civil War Conscription,” 429.

<sup>44</sup> Congress, “The Enrollment Act of 1863.”

<sup>45</sup> Murdock, *Patriotism Limited*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> “Cincinnatus or Belisarius—Which?,” October 25, 1886.

Bacon was not alone in his distaste for later-enlisted men. On September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1863 President Lincoln had penned his evaluation of men hesitant to enlist. In this address, Lincoln wrote that he was merely asking men to “do only what each one of at least a million of his manly brethren have already done,” the key word here being “manly.”<sup>47</sup> Lincoln’s implication was that to volunteer was to be a man, and to shirk one’s responsibility was to be anything but. Lincoln continued with this strategy for the remainder of this address. Lincoln added “Their [previous volunteers] toil and blood have been given as much for you as for themselves. Shall it be lost rather than that you, too, will bear your part?”<sup>48</sup> Lincoln also asked “Shall we shrink from the necessary means to maintain our free government, which our grandfathers employed to establish it and our own fathers have already employed once to maintain it? Are we degenerate? Has the manhood of our race run out?”<sup>49</sup> In these lines, Lincoln was expressing the ideas of hyper-masculinity found during the nineteenth century in order to nudge men into enlisting, lest they risk losing their claim to manhood.<sup>50</sup> Bacon’s referring to late-enlisters as “*things called men*” suggests that Lincoln’s condemnation had staying power, and that “true” veterans were grounding their status argument in the language of masculinity present during the war.

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<sup>47</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “Opinion on the Draft,” *The Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln* Vol. 9 Pt.2 (New York, NY: Lamb Publishing, 1905), 78.

<sup>48</sup> Lincoln, “Opinions on the Draft,” 78. Interestingly, Lincoln would employ similar, though softer, language in the “Gettysburg Address,” delivered the following month.

<sup>49</sup> Lincoln, “Opinions on the Draft,” 81.

<sup>50</sup> For more on manliness during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Elliot J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). For a closer look into masculinity in the Union army, see Lorien Foote, *The Gentlemen and The Roughs: Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010).

For Bacon and others, the meaning of veteranhood needed defending in the 1880s after the passage of the Arrears Act in 1879. In 1876, eight years prior to his Decoration day speech, Theodore Bacon delivered a Fourth of July oration at Palmyra, New York, the tone of which was far different from his later speech. In this earlier oration, Bacon discussed the Civil War, and even listed reasons why the Civil War ought not be celebrated, but never mentioned his distaste for later-enlisters.<sup>51</sup> Between the two speeches, however, Congress passed the Arrears Act, a pension bill which, as lawyer and law historian Peter Blanck describes, “provided that veterans could receive lump sum pension back payments that should have been granted as a result of their military service during the Civil War.”<sup>52</sup> Though pensions had been available dating back to the Pension Act of 1862, the lump sum payments of the Arrears Act made pensions far more expensive. In effect, if a veteran was wounded in 1863, and never filed for a pension, through the Arrears Act he could apply for a pension in, say, 1880, and receive the seventeen years of back pay to which he was entitled. The act was, according to Blanck, intended “as a means to attract ‘deserving’ veterans who had not applied for pensions,” but in practice was so enticing that it attracted a great number of fraudulent claims.<sup>53</sup> As Blanck notes, “A common view of the day, as exemplified in an 1887 editorial in the *Chicago Tribune*, was that the Arrears Act place ‘a premium upon, fraud, imposition, and perjury’ with regard to the nature of claimed disabilities.”<sup>54</sup> The Arrears Act proved to be expensive; pension expenditures doubled from

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<sup>51</sup> Theodore Bacon, *A Memorial of the Celebration at Palmyra, N.Y. of the Centennial Fourth of July, 1876*, (Rochester, NY: E.R. Andrews, 1876).

<sup>52</sup> Peter Blanck, “Civil War Pensions and Disability,” *Ohio State Law Journal*, vol. 62, no. 1 (2001), 122.

<sup>53</sup> Blanck, “Civil War Pensions and Disability,” 122.

<sup>54</sup> Editorial quoted in Blanck, “Civil War Pensions and Disability,” 123.

around thirty million dollars in 1878 to approximately sixty million in 1880, and to make matters worse public opinion held that the new money was going to the wrong places.<sup>55</sup>

Though Bacon never mentioned the Arrears Act by name, the way he framed his argument in 1884 made clear the legislation drove his ire. After describing the problems caused by the later-enlisted men, Bacon continued that their “evil influence is even now persistent and efficient,” and that indeed it was the late-enlisters behind “the successive adoption of the most stupendous schemes of retroactive payments that the world had ever dreamed of.”<sup>56</sup> It should be noted here that Bacon’s argument, that later-enlisted men pushed through the Arrears Act, was incorrect. Most historians credit George E. Lemon, editor of *The National Tribune* and an early enlister, as the driving force that secured the passing of the Arrears Act.<sup>57</sup> Further, historian Stuart McConnell’s study of GAR membership, *Glorious Contentment*, finds that later-enlisted men were underrepresented within leadership positions of the GAR, and therefore later-enlisted men would not have had the necessary GAR influence to push for pension reform.<sup>58</sup> Regardless of its factual inaccuracy, Bacon’s argument regarding the Arrears Act was a pivotal moment in his speech. This moment was where he used the dichotomy he created between early-enlisters and late-enlisters to refocus the negative public perceptions of veterans as a whole onto veterans who were late-enlisters, thus sparing the “true” veterans any loss in social status. Bacon furthered his argument when he proclaimed “true soldiers rise up and deny that the service which they rendered was a wage service and that the wages remain unpaid.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Blanck, “Civil War Pensions and Disability,” 128.

<sup>56</sup> “Cincinnatus or Belisarius—Which?,” October 25, 1886.

<sup>57</sup> Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 140.

<sup>58</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 67.

<sup>59</sup> “Cincinnatus or Belisarius—Which?,” October 25, 1886.

To drive home his point, Bacon turned to the classics, comparing the post-war behavior of Cincinnatus and Belisarius. Cincinnatus saved the Roman Republic in the fourth century BCE, and afterward returned to his plow asking nothing. Belisarius, on the other hand, similarly saved the Byzantine Empire in the fifth century CE, but ended his days as a beggar on the streets. Bacon ended his speech by asking his fellow veterans “Cincinnatus or Belisarius? Which?” asking them which legacy they would like to leave, that of a hero or that of a beggar.<sup>60</sup> In this section of his speech, Bacon was looking to convert the monetary capital of pensions into the symbolic capital that came with the selfless veteran, all the while transferring any symbolic debt accrued by the Arrears Act onto the lower class of veterans he constructed.

Bacon’s speech complicates our understanding of Union veterans. Far from the monolithic group that marched in the Grand Review in 1865, by the 1880s the veteran identity had become contested, with multiple voices attempting to define the term “veteran.” Even the exact definition of “true” veteranhood was diverse, and varied from man to man. Bacon, and others like him, were trying to guide veteranhood, in their own way, toward an exclusive identity, an identity that carried with it social capital. The veterans who shared this idea of “true” veteranhood were, however, a varied group with varying goals, even if they were connected by their use of the rhetoric of “true” veteranhood to accomplish those goals. It is not the intention of this study to replace one monolithic representation with another. Instead, my intent is to unpack the significance of this rhetoric in how it provided a platform upon which individual Union veterans could cement their understandings of themselves as having contributed valuable service to the nation during its time of need.

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<sup>60</sup> “Cincinnatus or Belisarius—Which?,” October 25, 1886.

While Bacon provides a baseline for the process of constructing a hierarchy within veteranhood, this process was far more complex than merely separating men by their enlistment date. Among Union veterans not all service was considered equal, and certain men felt they deserved distinction from others. In the discourse surrounding the Arrears Act, the identity of the “true” veteranhood hinged on three tenets: 1. A “true” veteran enlisted at the earliest possible opportunity and did so out of patriotic motivations, prior to the creation of the draft; 2. A “true” veteran had a long term of service; 3. A “true” veteran could be defined by his actions and behavior, such as always voting Republican. Common in these tenets is their connection to nineteenth century American masculinity. All three of these tenets involve a man controlling his fate, joining the struggle on his own accord, seeing the struggle to completion, and then controlling the political climate following the conflict. These tenets, in turn, shaped the “true” veterans’ claims to both prestige and resources.

## II. Enlistment Date

The main thrust of Theodore Bacon’s address was that men who enlisted after the Enrollment Act of 1863 were lesser than those who enlisted in 1861 or 1862. Proponents of “true” veteranhood widely disseminated this creed in the public discourse. In *Camp-Fire Chats of the Civil War*, W. Frank Bailey, a soldier since 1861, when enlisted in the 31st Pennsylvania Volunteers, voiced a similar sentiment to Bacon when he said: “You all remember, comrades,

that during the year or more previous to the close of the war, the position of a soldier ... was one of doubtful honor.”<sup>61</sup> Bailey went on to explain why soldiers had fall into such disgrace:

When the signs upon the horizon of our beloved Republic indicated her dismemberment, men thought not of toil, danger and privation; but sprang to her rescue with one consent, cheerfully giving all that life could afford as their individual offering upon a common altar as the price of her salvation. The best and noblest of the land, the pride of homes, the first-born of families, the beloved households, stepped into line, actuated only by motives of the purest patriotism. As time rolled on and our people became more acquainted with the privations and calamities incident to a protracted struggle, patriotism declined, and mercenary inducements were held out, which drew from the ranks of the people many who were *not solely* inspired by a love of country or pride in her honor; hence the position of the soldier was rendered more or less humiliating to those who enlisted at the outbreak ... But the record of the sufferings of the true soldier is eternal.<sup>62</sup>

Here Bailey made a clear distinction between men who enlisted early and men who enlisted late. In Bailey’s estimation, the best men enlisted early, and did so for the noblest of reasons, pure patriotism. Later-enlisted men, on the other hand, enlisted for the monetary reward. Bailey ended by salvaging the status of his fellow early-enlisted men, when stated that the record of the early-enlister, the “true soldier” was everlasting. Not all proponents of “true” veteranhood thought so little of the later-enlisted men, but they did feel that there should be some distinction between the later-enlister and the “true” veteran who enlisted at the first opportunity.

John Bell, a “true” veteran who enlisted in 1861 and served in Co. A, 21<sup>st</sup> Illinois, expressed his desire for distinction between early and late enlisters when he wrote in to the *National Tribune* in 1909. Bell began “Comrades, we old ‘61ers and ‘62ers take pleasure in seeing the late enlisters of ’63 and ’64 get and enjoy all of the pensions Congress can be persuaded to allow them, but we ask them this: Now, honestly, candidly, deep in your heart, do you not feel and acknowledge that of right and in unvarnished justice those who went out early

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<sup>61</sup> W. Frank Bailey, *Camp-Fire Chats of the Civil War: Being the Incident, Adventure and Wayside Exploit of the Bivouac and Battle Field, as Related by Members of the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chicago, IL: A.B. Gehman & Co., 1886), 92.

<sup>62</sup> Bailey, *Camp-Fire Chats of the Civil War*, 92-93.

and wrought long and late should have more?”<sup>63</sup> As Bell saw it, men who enlisted early deserved a bigger pension than the men who enlisted late. Bell, in a far more civil manner, followed Bacon’s pattern of creating a dichotomy between early-enlisters and late-enlisters, but unlike Bacon, Bell hoped to use his status as an early-enlister to increase his pension payments.

Bell’s argument helps to accentuate the fact that the idea of “true” veteranhood was far from set in stone. Instead, “true” veteranhood was a useful and malleable tool, and each man who helped define “true” veteranhood could employ it in the fashion he found most useful. Bacon, for example, used “true” veteranhood to distance himself from the criticism surrounding increased pension costs. Conversely, veterans like Bell sought a middle ground with regard to pensions. Bell did not object to pensions for later-enlisters, so long as that pension was smaller than his. Bell’s application of “true” veteranhood followed commonsensical logic, i.e., if a man invests double what the next man invests, he should expect to receive double the share in profits. Bell was attempting to increase his share of status and monetary reward.

While Bell argued for his idea of fair payments, other veterans were less measured when they wrote about men who enlisted late in the war. In a conversation recorded in the *Altoona Tribune*, a man described as an “old veteran” explained:

during the closing days of the war some went because they were drafted and couldn’t raise the money to hire substitutes; some went in order to receive \$500 in bounty money. Some took the bounty and deserted at the earliest opportunity. And I am acquainted with two or three fellows of that sort who are making a great ado over their connection with the army. They had a thoroughly disreputable record; they were mercenary cowards; they seem to think nobody remembers what they were. When I see fellows of that sort crowding real veterans to the rear and bragging about how they put down the rebellion it makes me hot. Oh yes, I have a right to talk; I was in from the start to finish.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Bell, “Scattering,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), August 5, 1909.

<sup>64</sup> “The Saunterer,” *Altoona Tribune* (Altoona, PA), May 27, 1895.

For this veteran, men who enlisted after the rising bounties of the Enrollment Act were very much of the same ilk, and deserved no credit for putting down the rebellion, a cause to which he himself devoted four years of his life for no bounty other than saving the nation. What seemed to frustrate this veteran was the ability for the late-enlister and deserter to pass for a “true” veteran, and it would appear the “old veteran” was justified in his frustration. After quoting the veteran, the reporter said that he “cannot attempt to distinguish [between a worthy and an unworthy veteran]. The button of the Union Veteran Legion or of the Grand Army of the Republic is enough” to receive the author’s homage.<sup>65</sup> That the writer cannot distinguish between the Union Veteran Legion (UVL) and the Grand Army of the Republic shows that he was not well versed in the contested nature of veteranhood, as the Union Veteran Legion was designed specifically to exclude the unworthy or later-enlisted veteran.

When reminiscing about the creation of the Union Veteran Legion in March of 1884, General A. B. Hay, first National Commander of the UVL, made clear the intent was to exclude unworthy veterans from the society. The Legion began, according to Hay, “with the idea that an organization should be formed composed of none but real soldiers, who had seen active service for a long period, and who had served their country from none other than patriotic motives, and where all who entered should be and had been comrades, not alone in name, but also in fact, met and founded our cherished order, none so highly prized by the true veterans all over the Union.”<sup>66</sup> Hay listed the full qualifications necessary for membership as: “the applicant must have been an officer, soldier, sailor or marine of the union army, navy, or marine corps during the war of the rebellion, who volunteered prior to July 1, 1863, for a term of three years, and was

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<sup>65</sup> “The Saunterer,” May 27, 1895.

<sup>66</sup> A.B. Hay, “History of the Union Veteran Legion,” *The Fort Wayne Evening Sentinel* (Fort Wayne, IN), September 11, 1900.

honorably discharged for any cause after a term of service of at least two continuous years, or [was] at any time discharged by reason of wounds received in line of duty.”<sup>67</sup> The regulations of the Union Veteran Legion were far more strict than other fraternal organizations formed after the Civil War, and were likely a response to the low standards for admission of the largest veterans’ organization, the Grand Army of the Republic.

Almost immediately following the Civil War, in 1866, Dr. Benjamin Franklin Stephenson founded the Grand Army of the Republic, which would develop into the largest and most politically powerful organization of Union Civil War veterans. At its founding, the GAR was meant to replace the feeling of camaraderie men felt while in the service. Though the GAR would develop into a more politically driven organization, it always aimed to enroll as many veterans as possible. To be eligible for membership in the GAR, men only had to have served in the military during the Civil War, and been honorably discharged.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast to those of the GAR, the rules of the Union Veteran Legion were intentionally strict so as to create an exclusive membership made up of only “true” veterans. In an 1894 article, the author described the driving factor of the UVL as the desire to associate with “no drafted person ... no substitute or bounty man” but instead with “only the true patriot and soldier of volunteer service record.”<sup>69</sup> Another article described the UVL practice of only accepting men who enlisted before July 1, 1863, then stated “It was, therefore, thought that the dividing line, as indicated above, would result in bringing together those whose patriotism could not be doubted.”<sup>70</sup> The men of the Union Veteran Legion considered themselves “true” veterans, and

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<sup>67</sup> Hay, “History of the Union Veteran Legion,” September 11, 1900.

<sup>68</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 24.

<sup>69</sup> “We Served Three Years,” *The Pittsburg Press* (Pittsburgh, PA), September 9, 1894.

<sup>70</sup> “Brief History of the Union Veteran Legion,” *The Salina Daily Union* (Salina, KS), June 30, 1899.

did not care to share their organization with men unworthy of that designation. Their requirement that a soldier must have enlisted prior to July 1, 1863 was implemented to remove any doubt of why a member of the Union Veteran Legion fought, as “until that period [July 1, 1863] no imputation [sic] could be cast on anyone that he had enlisted in the services of his government from mercenary motive or through fear of being compelled to do so by what was called the draft.”<sup>71</sup> The UVL prided itself on its exclusivity above anything else. In fact, one of the founders, Captain David Lowery, an advocate of strict regulations, had to resign after he designed a new set of requirements which his service could no longer satisfy. A martyr for the cause of “true” veteranhood, Lowery felt the strict rules necessary, lest “our doors be thrown wide open to many of the veriest [sic] cowards, who escaped from the service under the plea of disability when the real disease was cowardice.”<sup>72</sup> For the founders of the UVL, exclusivity was paramount.

The Union Veteran Legion was not the only fraternal organization that took extra measures to recruit only “true” veterans; the Union Veterans’ Union followed similar recruitment guidelines. The Union Veterans’ Union, formed in 1886, was intended to be more selective than previous organizations, such as the Grand Army of the Republic. In describing the Union Veterans’ Union to the *National Tribune*, a writer identified only as R.G.D., likely the Commander-in-Chief of the Union Veterans’ Union, Robert St. George Dyrenforth, explained that “The Union Veterans’ Union is organized in the sole interest of the true veteran of the war of the rebellion.”<sup>73</sup> Union veterans could not join the Union Veterans’ Union unless they had performed “actual service of not less than six months at the front between April 12, 1861 and

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<sup>71</sup> Hay, “History of the Union Veteran Legion,” September 11, 1900.

<sup>72</sup> Hay, “History of the Union Veteran Legion,” September 11, 1900.

<sup>73</sup> R.G.D., “Union Veterans’ Union,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), March 2, 1899.

April 30, 1865.”<sup>74</sup> Though the conditions for joining the UVU were slightly different than the UVL, with an emphasis on service over enlistment date, they both recognized a need to distinguish between worthy and unworthy veterans.

The presence of exclusionary veteran’s organizations, each discriminating against veterans who lacked the proper type of service to be deemed “worthy” of fraternizing with, shows a clear divide existed amongst veterans. According to Milner’s theory on status, this divide was a clear othering of Union veterans whose military record put them in a newly created lower class of veteran. Milner’s theory on status hierarchy suggests the “true” veterans of the U.V.L. and the U.V.U attached negative and inalienable status to the unworthy veteran’s service. Union veterans could not go back and enlist prior to July 1, 1863, nor could they reverse time and volunteer to serve six months at the front.<sup>75</sup> In the postbellum North, a soldier had no control over his worthiness of “true” veteranhood.

Some of the veterans excluded from the binary system of “true” veteranhood recognized their plight, and reacted as the “true” veterans had, by creating an even lower status of veterans. J. J. Day, for example, wrote in to the *National Tribune*, “there should be a difference made in giving pensions between the men who left their homes and schools in the early part of 1861, remaining with their companies until the war was entirely over. Such men should not ... be classed with the 90-days men [meaning ninety days of military service] or bounty jumpers.”<sup>76</sup> On the surface it would seem as though Day acted against his own best interest by calling for increased pensions for men he deemed worthy veterans, as he was not a member of that worthy

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<sup>74</sup> “The Union Veterans’ Union,” *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), March 4, 1889.

<sup>75</sup> Milner, *Status and Sacredness*, 31.

<sup>76</sup> J.J. Day, “A Distinction Should Be Made,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), July 4, 1907.

group. Indeed, Day “was a nine-months man [meaning nine-months of military service] ... and noticed the greatest difference between these old stand-bys and the nine-months men when in battle.”<sup>77</sup> Upon deeper analysis, however, Day was following the same rhetorical formula Theodore Bacon employed in his Decoration Day speech. Day sacrificed some status in order to separate himself from the lowest class of veterans. Day admitted that nine-months men, such as himself, were less deserving than the upper class of veterans, but in so doing he placed himself above “90-days men and bounty jumpers.” As a result of Day’s construction, he inhabited a new mid-level status of veteranhood in a three-tiered system, rather than the lower class in a two-tiered system. Day’s efforts to find a middle ground between short-service and long-service illustrated how important length of service was to veterans trying to find their place in the veteran hierarchy. Day could accept that he did not belong with veterans of the highest status, but it was still important to him that he was not identified with those veterans of the lowest status, either.

### III. Length of Service

While Day paid attention to the difference between men’s enlistment date, he also addressed the second tenet of “true” veteranhood, length of service. In Day’s letter the length of these men’s service had become unofficial titles for types of veterans, “90-days men” or “nine-months.” Even the “old stand-bys” that he praised were worthy of that praise because of their date of enlistment *and* the long terms of service they provided. Other veterans agreed with Day that “true” veteranhood depended on length of service.

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<sup>77</sup> Day, “A Distinction Should Be Made,” July 4, 1907.

On May 7, 1907, E.C. Crocker, Civil War veteran from New York, published a poem in *The National Tribune* entitled “Early Experience.” The poem described a man “Who packed up all his worldly things to be a soldier-man.” As he was marching off to war, the burden became too heavy to carry “And so he soon began to shed the things that he could spare.” By the end of his march the man had rid himself of all of his possessions save for his rifle, to which “no harm befell.” Encumbered then only by his trusty rifle, the soldier continued on, “Just four long years and seasoned thru, he marches in the Grand Review down Washington’s board avenue, True Veteran, indeed.” In this poem, Crocker highlighted the enthusiasm with which men went off to war. In the end, when the soldier actually experienced the conflict, he had to strip himself of all of his goods and possessions, and could keep only his rifle. This sacrifice that allowed him to make it through the war. In his poem Crocker made a point that many “true” veterans would make when describing their service: the true veteran did not simply enter the fray at the first call, he also had to be willing to endure to the burden of war, and remain until the end, to be a “true” veteran.<sup>78</sup>

In the construction of “true” veteranhood, many former soldiers looked to their terms served in order to define their veteranhood. When discussing how one became a veteran, Union Veteran Legion Commander-in-Chief A.B. Hay wrote:

During the war the government deemed only those as veterans who had served at least two years, and while all who in any manner, and for any term served or assisted our government in the suppression of that most gigantic rebellion and the preservation of the union, are and should be entitled to the full measure of praise and reward for all that they did. Still, men did not become veterans in a day or tried comrades in a month; ties of friendship and ties of comradeship were made and formed during long years of bitter trials and sufferings.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> E.C. Crocker, “Early Experience,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), May 2, 1907.

<sup>79</sup> Hay, “History of the Union Veteran Legion,” September 11, 1900.

Hay was addressing the issue of the variance within the lengths of service given by Civil War soldiers. Men like Hay, who served the four years between 1861 and 1865, found it difficult to see men who served for only ninety days as their equal.

Similar to Hay, a veteran going by the pseudonym “A Lincoln Soldier of ‘61” contacted *The Detroit Free Press* regarding who was deserving of the title “veteran.” The “Lincoln Soldier” “asked the *National Tribune* to define the term ‘veteran’ as applied to soldiers of the rebellion.”<sup>80</sup> Though it seems the *Tribune* did not answer his question, he explained that “My object was to learn if a soldier enlisting during the last few months of the war and getting from \$500 to \$1,000 bounty and seeing no service, came home fat and merry, found his \$1,000 in bank or in his mother’s stocking, is entitled at this late date the same consideration as the poor, emaciated fellow who went through so much for three or four years, and in their manhood’s prime with no thousand to recuperate on their return.”<sup>81</sup> Not only was the Lincoln soldier upset that a man who enlisted so late and served so briefly would be entitled to the same claim to veteranhood as he, a soldier who enlisted in 1861 and had fought for four years, but that this late-enlistee had become wealthy in the process. This sentiment that short service did not deserve equal pension reward to long service was common amongst “true” veterans.

A veteran sending his comments to *The Lima News* had similar issues with how short service was rewarded, particularly with regard to pension payments. The veteran did not seem particularly exacting of his fellow soldier, writing “While it is true that all soldiers are not veterans, it is also true that all men who wore the blue were soldiers and did their duty, let that be great or small. My heart is large enough to let enter therein respect for any man who wore the

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<sup>80</sup> A Lincoln Soldier of ‘61, “An Old Soldier Protests,” *The Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, MI), May 21, 1890.

<sup>81</sup> “An Old Soldier Protests,” May 21, 1890.

blue ... a true veteran looks down upon no man because of his short service.”<sup>82</sup> But though the veteran was defensive of any man’s service, he was far from willing to accept them as all being equal, adding “A true veteran only kicks when such men lay claim to something that does not belong to them. It is right that all soldiers should have a pension; but it is not right that a short service man should have as great a pension as a long service man.”<sup>83</sup> This veteran was not willing to accept that a short service man was entitled to the benefits of veteranhood in the same respect as a “true” veteran was entitled. Issues regarding entitlement were not limited to monetary matters alone. Unfounded claims to status by “unworthy” men were also met with quick and severe censure from the “true” veterans of the Union army.

Men who tried to capitalize on their service and status as veterans, and did so in a dishonest manner, risked receiving the ridicule of “true” veterans. While running for Governor of Ohio, Democrat John Pattison made the mistake of attempting to gain the veteran vote under the pretense that he was a “true” veteran with the following ad: “Comrades, stand by the men that stood by the guns in ’61 and ’65 ... Such a man is Comrade John Pattison.”<sup>84</sup> When “true” veterans looked into Pattison’s record, and discovered he was only a 100 days man, they tore into him:

An examination of the records shows that “Comrade Pattison” has the same sort of a blood-stained, battle-shattered record as “Comrade Evans,” late of the Pension Bureau. That is, they both belonged to the 100 days’ service, but Evans has the advantage on Pattison inasmuch as Evans served 121 days, while Pattison served 111 days. That is, Evans leads Pattison by 10 days’ more service given to the country. It is true that the ordinary veteran does not think 10 days of serious importance, but it is a great deal when a man has only some 100 days in the army to boast of ... There were tens of thousands of boys who went out in the 100 days’ service who re-enlisted in other organizations because they felt the need of the country for men, and they fought valiantly in the closing battles of the war ... 100 days of easy guard duty along the Baltimore & Ohio R.R. was all that “Comrade Pattison” was willing to give to the sorely endangered country, and then he returned to his home to embrace the many

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<sup>82</sup> “A Veteran’s Comments,” *The Lima News* (Lima, OH), April 1, 1890.

<sup>83</sup> “A Veteran’s Comments,” April 1, 1890.

<sup>84</sup> “Comrade’ Pattison,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), October 26, 1905.

opportunities for money-making presented, because the other active young men his age were at the front fighting the battles of Cedar Creek, Franklin, Nashville and Petersburg ... As a result of this “Comrade Pattison” is one of the wealthiest men in the State.<sup>85</sup>

After discounting Pattison’s record, the article mentioned that he “returned to his home to embrace the many opportunities for money-making.” Part of the bitterness between long-service men and everyone else was due to the fact that by serving longer “true” veterans lost opportunities to set up their lives. Civilians who stayed were able to take advantage of these opportunities, and given a head start in setting up their adult lives.

To conclude this article, the author juxtaposed Pattison with the description of a “true” veteran. “The candidate for Lieutenant-Governor, Gen. Andrew L. Harris, was one of Ohio’s faithful, long-serving, gallant soldiers, who instead of a paltry 111 days to his credit, has over four years from the firing on Fort Sumter to Appomattox—1,460 days, or 14 times as much service.”<sup>86</sup> The importance of length of service to the author was highlighted through his implementation of four different methods of describing the length of time Harris serve: years, battles, days, and multiples of Pattison’s service. The article was a clear rebuke of Pattison’s attempt to appeal to those he considered his fellow veterans. Pattison endeavored to use his military service as symbolic capital to persuade veterans to vote for him, but his mistake was in making a claim that his length of service could not justify.

Similar rebukes occurred often, if not with the same vigor as that of John Pattison. After the 10<sup>th</sup> Illinois had received praise for their service, the following note was sent in to the *Tribune*: “Lieut. F.M. Collins, 60<sup>th</sup> Ill., Daville, Ill. denies that the 10<sup>th</sup> Ill. was robbed of its honors which should be given it on account of the detachment that fought at Buzzards Roost. While it is true that these veterans did superbly and were complimented by everyone, they were

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<sup>85</sup> “‘Comrade’ Pattison,” October 26, 1905.

<sup>86</sup> “‘Comrade’ Pattison,” October 26, 1905.

only a detachment, and the regiment was at the time at home eating pie, cake and fried chicken, and having a fine time in God's country."<sup>87</sup> In Collins' estimation, praise ought only to be given to the specific man who earned it; men who were spending time at home were not involved in heroics. "True" veterans responded similarly when nine-months men attempted to push their claims of veteranhood too far. "J.C. Thomas, 30<sup>th</sup> Mo., Webber, Kan., disputes Comrade Dodge's claim that the nine-months men were pushed to the front, and without them Fort Hudson and Vicksburg would not have been taken. Nine-month men at the front was the exception rather than the rule, and there was not a nine-months man at Vicksburg ... He would not take any glory from the nine-months men, but they must not claim too much."<sup>88</sup> Access to status and acclaim was heavily policed by fellow veterans. If a nine-months man attempted to claim that he and his fellow short service men deserved undue credit, his fellow veterans would check him.

"True" veterans of long service felt justified in their claims to status and greater pensions because, in their estimation, they had sacrificed their opportunity to grow rich from the booming wartime economy. In a sense, "true" veterans viewed themselves as economic martyrs, as they sacrificed their financial livelihood for the survival of the nation. In a *National Tribune* article that discussed poor veterans in need of monetary aid, a journalist asked "And how could it well be otherwise? They lost four years of opportunities of amassing wealth at a period when the foundations of nearly all the great fortunes of these days were laid. They were denied the payment of money through the failure of Congress to equalize the bounties due them from the Government."<sup>89</sup> In this description of the veterans' service, not only did the "true" veteran give

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<sup>87</sup> "The 10<sup>th</sup> Ill. Detachment," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), January 16, 1908.

<sup>88</sup> "Nine-Months Men," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), January 30, 1908.

<sup>89</sup> "Charity," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), December 20, 1883.

up his opportunity in the marketplace, but he was also betrayed by a government that refused to reward his early and long service just as they rewarded later-enlisted short-service big-bounty men.

“True” veterans considered their service long, arduous, and costly, but also a patriotic duty. This combination of factors created a surprising crisis of masculinity for some veterans. While military service was perhaps the epitome of nineteenth century manly behavior, a man was also measured by his ability to accumulate wealth. The manliness of “true” veterans, then, was conflicted. Soldiers faced the horrors of war, but in so doing they delayed their ability to establish themselves in the economy by four years. Therefore, if the veterans sacrificed their economic standing during the war, the veteran’s primary reward was the esteem he received when returning home as the nation’s savior. In their own estimation “true” veterans sacrificed a great deal to attain their status and symbolic capital, and refused to allow “unworthy” veterans to coopt this status without reproach. But this policing of veteranhood was not limited to claiming status for self, it was also utilized as a means of controlling the actions and behaviors of others.

#### IV. Actions and Behavior

In *Status and Sacredness*, Murray Milner suggests that status can be gained within a status group through adherence to the social norms of that group. As Milner describes it, “The first source of status is the approval received for *conformity* to social norms, or conversely, the disapproval received for nonconformity. According to [sociologist Max] Weber, the crucial requirement to be a member of a status group is conformity to a prescribed lifestyle. ‘In content, status honor is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific style of life is

expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle.”<sup>90</sup> This demand for group conformity existed within “true” veteranhood, with social norms, most centered around masculinity, often being set in public discourse, such as the newspaper.

In practice, the setting of social norms for “true” veterans would resemble the following statement: “The true veteran will do without bread, and even starve, rather than beg.”<sup>91</sup> In this decree, the author was describing how a “true” veteran ought to behave, while implying exclusion from the group if he behaves differently. “True” veterans also use this process to practice what Milner termed as “editing.” Defined by Milner, editing is the process in which “the embarrassing feature of reality and routinely accepted deviations from supposedly honored ideals are studiously ignored, or at least not given legitimacy of formal recognition. For example, the important contributions of blacks and women were left out of American history books.”<sup>92</sup> Rather than ignore misdeeds of veterans, “true” veterans would often edit out this behavior by ascribing it to those of the lower class of veterans. Read another way, the quotation “The true veteran will do without bread, and even starve, rather than beg,”<sup>93</sup> could be read as “any veteran that is begging is not a “true” veteran, and does not belong to our group,” thereby protecting the status of “true” veteranhood.

The process of editing was most plainly visible when addressing begging. As seen in his speech, Theodore Bacon used the beggar Belisarius as the example of what no veteran should aspire to become. The issue stemmed from the fact that some veterans of the Civil War were unable to reintegrate into civil society, and fell into poverty, homelessness, and begging. Though

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<sup>90</sup> Milner, *Status and Sacredness*, 35.

<sup>91</sup> “Charity,” December 20, 1883.

<sup>92</sup> Milner, *Status and Sacredness*, 37.

<sup>93</sup> “Charity,” December 20, 1883.

wealth was important to manhood during the nineteenth century, it would be more manly to be destitute than to accumulate wealth through begging. The image of a beggar was not the image Union veterans wanted associated with themselves, and they often battled fiercely against such associations. One such example can be seen in George B. Zane's letter to the editor of *The National Tribune*:

In your issue of Jan. 28, 1897, you publish an article headed a 'Chronic Beggar,' as follows: 'O.M. Spinner, Joe Hooker Post, Atlantic City, N.J., sends a protest against one Lou Staring being allowed to prey upon the G.A.R. posts and W.R.C. He is a chronic beggar, and should be shown up.' Now, then, there is no such person as O. M. Spinner known in Joe Hooker Post, Atlantic City, N.J., and I have failed to find a person who knows either Spinner or Lou Staring. I hope you will correct this in your next issue as we do not allow old soldiers to beg here.<sup>94</sup>

Zane, a member of the Joe Hooker Post in question and a "true" veteran of 1861, was so offended by the accusation that there was a beggar in his post that he felt it necessary to take action in order to have the mistake publicly corrected. The veteran beggar was a risk to the status of all veterans, and was far outside of the accepted social norms of veteranhood.

"True" veterans frequently used the process of setting social norms to promote proper behavior. In order to promote membership in the Grand Army of the Republic, for example, T.E. Potter, a high-ranking member of the GAR wrote an article with the six reasons why all veterans should join the GAR. Simplified, these reasons are: one, it is the duty of every vet to aid in the work of the GAR as it is an organization that helps all veterans; two, GAR membership encourages all veterans to be proud that they were a soldier; three, the GAR will preserve each member's own history and memory for posterity; four, pensions are largely the result of the work of the GAR, so veterans should give back; five, to be worthy of the GAR is a badge of honor and a status symbol; and six, they owe it to their children and friends as their associates will share in

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<sup>94</sup> George B. Zane, "A Disclaimer," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), February 11, 1897.

that status and honor.<sup>95</sup> The final point of the article is that for the Grand Army “to do its mightiest and best it needs every true and honorable veteran within its ranks.”<sup>96</sup> Clearly if one wanted to be a true and honorable veteran, they must join the GAR.

As with the list of reasons for joining the GAR, “true” veterans also prescribed specific actions veterans must perform in order to achieve “true” veteran status, such as voting Republican. In an article in the *National Tribune* describing how beneficial it would be and necessary it was to reelect President William McKinley, the author wrote “The interests of our beloved country demand this, and that is an appeal never made in vain to any true veteran.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore in order to be a “true” veteran one must perform the actions of a “true” veteran, and vote the proper way. This call to vote Republican was far from an isolated occurrence. During the Congressional campaign for Captain Rowell, the Honorable B.F. Funk gave a speech on Rowell’s behalf, and during it asked the crowd “In 1861 to 1864 who was the soldier’s friend? The battle-scarred soldier or the office-seeking young lawyer laying the foundation of a future? Do you believe that Capt. Rowell will not stand by the soldier now in Congress?” to which the crowd replied “No, No.” Funk followed by saying “Then I appeal to every true veteran to deposit his ballot for the brave man and the soldiers’ comrade and friend, Captain Rowell.” To this appeal, the crowd cried out “We will; we will.”<sup>98</sup> When Democrats tried to sway the staunchly Republican veteran voting bloc, “true” veterans never wavered. In response to a call from Democrats to the veterans for the need to end tariffs, a veteran wrote: “The veterans do not regard with favor this attempt to influence their action.” Veteran Thomas L. Reed replied to the

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<sup>95</sup> T.E. Potter, “Recruit the G.A.R.,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), August 8, 1907.

<sup>96</sup> Potter, “Recruit the G.A.R.,” August 8, 1907.

<sup>97</sup> “The Attitude of the Veterans,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), October 11, 1900.

<sup>98</sup> “Hon. B.F. Funk,” *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), November 3, 1882.

call by saying “I cannot see, by any reasoning power, how a true veteran or ex-soldier can for one moment cast his vote to uphold any party whose war record is such as that of the so-called Democratic party.”<sup>99</sup> Because the power of the veterans stemmed from their ability to influence elections with their large numbers, their voting habits were closely controlled.

This idea of “voting like a true veteran,” however, begs the question of whether it was really in the veteran’s best interest to vote Republican, or if it was political manipulation. Some veterans considered it a necessity to detest Democrats, and instead vote Republican, given the Democratic party’s link to the start of the Civil War. If a veteran were to vote Democrat, others might see it as contrary to the ideals for which they fought so long and hard. Republicans were also proponents of veteran pensions, while Democrats campaigned against the tariff system that funded the veteran pension program. While the push to vote Republican could have been political gamesmanship, an attempt by Republicans to play up the desired status of “true” veteranhood in order to strengthen the position of the party, Republican policies did reward veterans for their votes. Regardless of the intentions behind this directive, that the authors of these sentiments felt there was a connection to “true” veteranhood strong enough to influence voting habits is a testament to the prevalence and power of the label “true” veteran.

Aside from the political behaviors of veterans, most of the behaviors influenced by the social norms of “true” veteranhood were simply in accordance with the social norms of masculinity and of American society. In an obituary for Z.M. Atterberry, for example, he was described as having “bore his sufferings like a true soldier.”<sup>100</sup> Handling one’s burdens privately was an extremely masculine ideal. To bear a burden in silence was to bear it like a man, while

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<sup>99</sup> “Not Caught with Chaff,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), October 18, 1892.

<sup>100</sup> “ATTERBERRY,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), August 8, 1907.

showing emotion or sentiment exuded femininity. Manliness was a common theme in the behavioral examples of “true” veteranhood. The description of one veteran, severely wounded in battle, noted that after his injury, “His indomitable spirit pulled him through, and for nearly a whole generation since the rebellion was crushed he has been acting the part of a good citizen, meeting and performing the duties of civil life as bravely and with as intense patriotism as when he shed his blood for the Union.”<sup>101</sup> To cap off the description, the author added that this man was a “true-hearted veteran.”<sup>102</sup> Because so many veterans returned from war with lifelong wounds, it was critical that veterans understand that they must bear their cross with dignity, lest veterans develop the reputation of a complainer. “True” veteranhood was as much about what “true” veterans did *not* do, as it was about what they did.

Proscription was also common within descriptions of performative “true” veteranhood. For example, when stories began to surface about old veterans remarrying younger women, “true” veterans quickly made clear that this behavior was unacceptable. “J.R. Lamson, 2d Mass., Liberty, Me., takes comrade Urton to task. He does not believe that there is any true veteran aged from 65 to 70 who would ask a good, honest girl of 19 to marry him. A man who would do such a thing has not received the experience from service that he should have.”<sup>103</sup> While veterans shamed one another out of acts, such as marrying young girls, which could damage perceptions of veteranhood, they also shamed one another out of silence when outsiders criticized fellow veterans. R.W. Oliver, a veteran who enlisted in 1861, was upset about a newspaper that had portrayed veterans poorly, explained how group solidarity could make any opponent howl: “I, for one, will never, by word, vote or money, support any man, party or paper that slurs, or helps

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<sup>101</sup> “The Saunterer,” May 27, 1895.

<sup>102</sup> “The Saunterer,” May 27, 1895.

<sup>103</sup> “Marrying Young Girls,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), December 1, 1910.

in any way to raise or keep up this hue and cry about the soldier. If all true veterans would act upon this principle they would soon convince our politicians and editors that a force sufficient to quell a gigantic rebellion had enough vitality still left, if used, to make it felt at home.”<sup>104</sup> Any item that harmed the whole group, be it through action or inaction, was unacceptable.

The final component of the behavior of a “true” veteran was adherence to the original principles that drove him to war. In describing a new military organization in Camden, New Jersey, the author mentions that “This military corps is composed of none but true veterans, who have been in actual service. They are, moreover, all uncompromising Unionists.”<sup>105</sup> While the writer structured their Unionism as being in addition to their being “true veterans,” the connection between the two is clear. Veterans went off to war to preserve the Union, so a “true” veteran returned still a Unionist. Disavowing actions of their defeated enemies was also paramount to “true” veteranhood. When the *Harrisburg Telegraph* printed a story stating that “The veterans of Armstrong county are opposed to the display of Confederate flags,” the natural response was “Why, certainly, and so are all true veterans.”<sup>106</sup> The Union army accomplished victory over the Confederate flag, and to accept the flying of the Confederate flag would be completely contrary to that accomplishment. Such acceptance did not exist within a “true” veteran.

That certain Union veterans attempted to control the behavior and actions of their own is typical of a status group. When one member of the group failed to comply, the entire reputation of the group was tarnished. And the behaviors and actions supported or decried by “true” veterans did not stray much from the social norms of civilized society, save for the inclusion of

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<sup>104</sup> R. W. Oliver, “For Shame!,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), March 1, 1883.

<sup>105</sup> “Military,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), March 26, 1867.

<sup>106</sup> “Fact and Comment,” *Harrisburg Telegraph* (Harrisburg, PA), October 19, 1888.

militaristic behaviors. Men who were not meeting the social norms of the “true” veteran were edited out of the group so as to save the reputation of the “worthy.” In a social group such as veterans, in which so much has been sacrificed in order to gain their social status and symbolic capital, injuries to the group’s reputation were often met by amputating the “diseased” member.

## V. Why “True” Veteranhood?

In many senses “true” veteranhood existed implicitly prior to its explicit construction by former Union soldiers. The tenets of “true” veteranhood (early enlistment, long service, and behavior that reflects well on the group) were all aspects that would make up a respectable soldier, veteran, and man in nineteenth century America. It was a fact that during the Civil War some men fought earlier, longer, and harder than others. What is puzzling about this process of identity creation is the stimulus that spurred some men to make “true” veteranhood an *explicit* construction, an identity meant for public consumption. However, when looking through newspapers and speeches, the term “true veteran,” and its application to a specific group of veterans, was largely absent in the public discourse prior to the 1880s. It seems likely that there were two main factors which brought about “true” veteranhood: The Arrears Act of 1879, and pensions in general, and the dramatic growth of the Grand Army of the Republic in the late 1870s and 1880s.

The Arrears Act had a clear and negative effect on the public’s perceptions of veterans. As a pension bill designed to entice eligible veterans to claim their pensions by offering back pay in lump sum form, the act proved to be expensive. Effectively doubling the cost of the pension system in a single year, the Arrears Act became a point of contention, and turned veterans into a

burden to the Federal Government's budget.<sup>107</sup> After the backlash against the Arrears Act men like Bacon responded in public speeches blaming the "mercenaries" who enlisted late in the war for demanding such expensive pension bills. To protect their status, the self-proclaimed "true" veterans of the Union responded by creating an underclass of veterans: men who enlisted later in the war, or served only a short period of time. The service of these men made them easy targets toward which the more established veterans redirected the blame for an expensive pension system. In this circumstance, the Arrears Act encouraged "true" veteranhood as a sort of shield. Behind "true" veteranhood, deserving men could claim rewards but also protect their status against the public's damaging aspersions of greed.

After the passage of the Arrears Act the pension issue consistently held a primary place within veteran discourse. Though talks of veteran pensions were near omnipresent in the pages of veteran publications such as *The National Tribune*, these ideas rarely materialized into law. The veterans' lone success in pension lobbying, following the Arrears Act, was the Disability and Dependent Pension Act of 1890. This act made all veterans "who served ninety days or more in the military or naval service of the United States during the late war of the rebellion and who have been honorably discharged" eligible for a pension of between six and twelve dollars per month.<sup>108</sup> The costs of this act became especially high after an executive order designated any Union veteran over the age of sixty-two was eligible for the pension, as old age became a disability. It was not long after 1890 that all veterans were eligible for pensions due to their age alone.

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<sup>107</sup> Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," 123.

<sup>108</sup> Congress, "Disability and Dependent Pension Act, June 27, 1890" *Congressional Record*. 51st Cong. 1st Sess. Ch. 634, 1890.

Pensions, however, were not the only issue that inspired the creation of “true” veteranhood. “True” veteranhood emerged at the same time that interest in remembering the war began to reappear in popular discourse. The public’s interest in Civil War veterans and the Civil War itself was low until around the late 1870s. As historian Stuart McConnell notes, “for the first decade or so” after the Civil War “it seemed unlikely that there would ever be much interest in remembering the war ... Fewer war novels were published in the 1870s than in any decade, magazines rarely ran articles about it, and the few wartime newspapers catering specifically to veterans ... quickly disappeared.”<sup>109</sup> During the 1870s the horrors of the Civil War were too fresh. In the 1880s, however, public interest in the Civil War and Civil War veterans reemerged. The memory of the war had become distant and sanitized. Veterans’ organizations saw a similar lack of interest, “the GAR, after a promising beginning, saw membership plunge to an all-time low of 26,899 in 1876.”<sup>110</sup> Though the idea of a veteran “hibernation” is disputed within the current historiography, in terms of public interest and GAR participation, popularity of veteranhood was certainly waning in the early-to-mid 1870s.<sup>111</sup> The GAR’s membership began to change in the late 1870s, however, as “former soldier and ‘civilian’ alike began to rediscover the war,” and the GAR entered a period of growth that would last until 1890.<sup>112</sup> Veteranhood’s presence in the public sphere was expanding.

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<sup>109</sup> McConnell, “Who Joined the Grand Army,” 142.

<sup>110</sup> McConnell, “Who Joined the Grand Army,” 142.

<sup>111</sup> Both Caroline E. Janney, in *Remembering the Civil War*, 104, and Brian Matthew Jordan, in *Marching Home*, 68-69, challenge Linderman’s claim that veterans went into “hibernation” between 1865-1880, but do not dispute that the public was largely disinterested in veteran affairs during this period. In fact, Jordan argues that it was the public’s indifference toward veterans that brought veterans together during this period.

<sup>112</sup> McConnell, “Who Joined the Grand Army,” 142.

When veterans joined the GAR, they became more visible. They wore buttons and uniforms making it obvious they had served in the Civil War. Visibility, however, became an issue, due to the finite nature of status. The status of the visible veteran, meaning membership in the GAR, went from being relatively exclusive, with 26,899 visible veterans in 1876, to being far more common, as veteran enrollment in the GAR ballooned into the hundreds of thousands in the 1880s.<sup>113</sup> Whereas a visible veteran was a relative rarity in the early-to-mid 1870s, by the 1880s there were literally ten times the number of veterans who were participating in the GAR. The more veterans that became identifiable, the less special each individual veteran became. But it was not just the sheer number of veterans that concerned the “true” veterans, it was also the *type* of veterans that were embracing their identity that could lower the group status.

Particularly injurious to the status of veteranhood was the way the leadership of the GAR went about increasing their numbers. In his study of the membership enrolled in the GAR, McConnell notes that following the lows of the early-to-mid 1870s there were a number of changes to the rules of the GAR. McConnell writes, “The net effect of the changes was to make it easier to join the GAR, less constricting to belong, and harder to be expelled.”<sup>114</sup> Even the editors of the *Tribune*, a publication typically obsessed with growth, saw reason for concern in some practices that were being adopted to increase the number of practicing veterans. In an article praising the increase in membership in the department of Michigan, the author cautions against enlisting the wrong men: “But while we are anxious to increase our membership, let us use more care in examining the applications of recruits to our ranks, so that none unworthy may obtain admittance to our Post rooms. In seeking to increase our membership, let us also seek to

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<sup>113</sup> Milner, *Status and Sacredness*, 34.

<sup>114</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 45.

maintain the honor of the Order and make the Grand Army a home for every worthy, true, and loyal soldier of the rebellion.”<sup>115</sup> Clearly the author was concerned with some of the recruitment practices he was witnessing. If the methods being employed to enroll new members was worrisome to the degree that it troubled even the editors of the *Tribune*, a publication which consistently praised growth, it would have infuriated the proponent of “true” veteranhood. The Union Veteran Legion formed in 1884, and the Union Veterans’ Union formed in 1886, one year and three years after the Michigan article, respectively. Considering the focus these organizations had on recruiting only worthy men, it seems plausible these GAR recruitment practices were at least partially responsible.

There are other documented examples of GAR practices that would have affected the perceptions of honor regarding the Order. In perhaps the most egregious affront to veterans concerned with the exclusive status of veteranhood, McConnell notes that many posts created “what they called ‘honorary’ or ‘associate’ memberships, under which local worthies were admitted to meetings and post social events; in some cases they also received GAR badges.”<sup>116</sup> Veteran complaints about this practice date back to 1879. For those veterans who felt it necessary to distinguish themselves as “true” veterans, distinct from other unworthy veterans, enrolling a civilian in the GAR was the ultimate insult to their status as veterans. With the creation of “honorary” and “associate” memberships, it no longer took any service to inhabit the performative identity of veteranhood.

Through creating a class system within veteranhood, some former soldiers found a way to return exclusivity to veteran status. Unwilling to share their status with men they deemed their

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<sup>115</sup> “Michigan,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), August 2, 1883.

<sup>116</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 120.

inferior, the men who espoused “true” veteranhood followed a few specific guidelines: when, and for how long, a “true” veteran served, or how a “true” veteran ought to behave, but ultimately these men crafted their superior identities in ways they felt best represented and benefited themselves. By broadcasting their constructed identities through public speeches and letters in to the *National Tribune*, “true” veterans hoped their class system would gain wide acceptance by the public, maintaining or even augmenting their claim to status.

As a unifying identity, and a measure of social status, “true” veteranhood only ever successfully took hold within the veteran community. The public was largely unaccepting of the “worthy” and “unworthy” dichotomy constructed by the veterans, and often came to the defense of the “true” veteran’s foil. In response to Theodore Bacon’s description of late enlisters, one writer asserted that Mr. Bacon was not “just in his sweeping censure of the troops raised toward the close of the war. Many of these were as patriotic, many of them as self-sacrificing, as were those who joined the ranks at the first call for enlistments.”<sup>117</sup> John M. Pattison, the man criticized severely for having only served 111 days in the Civil War, became the forty-third governor of Ohio in 1906. After the old veteran had become “hot” over late-enlisters staking exaggerated claims to victory, the reporter reminded the reader that “None of us is perfect. The ‘boys’ who maintained the honor of the flag and the integrity of the government were nearly all young. Few of them were gifted with angelic attributes and some were weak in divers [sic] ways. But they were really members of the federal army, and in their way they did something—some more, some less—to preserve the republic founded by our fathers.”<sup>118</sup> The reticence of the ordinary citizen to accept some veterans as “unworthy” likely stems from the symbolic capital

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<sup>117</sup> “Cincinnatus or Belisarius—Which?,” October 25, 1886.

<sup>118</sup> “The Saunterer,” May 27, 1895.

the “true” veterans were hoping to maintain. After all, even the lowest veteran did at least enlist, which was more of a claim than the civilian could make. Together, the veterans had won the war, so how could the civilian justify questioning the veteran’s contribution, when the civilian had never left home?

## **Chapter II**

### **Inclusive Veteranhood:**

*The National Tribune, the GAR, and the Veterans*

## I. Strength in Numbers

In the November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1894 edition of *The National Tribune*, the editors shared their joy with their readers. After an especially successful midterm election cycle in 1894, which saw the defeat of numerous Democratic candidates, the editors of the *Tribune* celebrated. In this issue, the editors ran an article titled “The Glorious Result.” Hyperbole abounded, as the article began “It is very hard to write temperately of the glorious result achieved by the elections last week. It is equally hard to speak appropriately.”<sup>119</sup> As if this expression of excitement was not enough to make the author’s point, he followed it up with a military analogy, “It is like trying to speak temperately and appropriately of Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Appomattox. They were crowing victories of the sword, which brought our enemies to the dust, and relieved us of all dread concerning them. This was a victory at the ballot-box, which in a day overthrew our swelling enemies, and changed their attitude from proud overbearing to abject humiliation.”<sup>120</sup> The militaristic nature of the language used to describe their political victory, such as “victories of the sword,” or “overthrew our swelling enemies,” was a way for the editors of the *Tribune* to connect their victory in politics to the victories on the battlefield. And what a victory it was. The Democrats, enemies to the veterans and their beloved pensions, lost over one-hundred seats in the House of Representatives, and four seats in the Senate, both of which flipped Republican.

The author’s final message in this article was to pay a debt of gratitude. The article thanked and applauded those responsible for the jubilee, “To the veterans we give unlimited congratulations and praise for their part in this great work. They responded with old-time unanimity and enthusiasm to our appeals for a solid array against the common enemy.”<sup>121</sup> In the

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<sup>119</sup> “The Glorious Result,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), November 15, 1894.

<sup>120</sup> “The Glorious Result,” November 15, 1894.

<sup>121</sup> “The Glorious Result,” November 15, 1894.

same issue, the editors of the *Tribune* further explained why such a victory was possible: “As we have asserted all along, the veterans in themselves, and those they can influence, control about 2,000,000 votes, if not more; and when they get together, the other fellows know how it feels to be struck by a cyclone.”<sup>122</sup> The election of 1894 exemplified that the editors of the *Tribune* and the leaders of the Grand Army of the Republic believed since the founding of the GAR in 1866: numbers equaled power. From its founding in 1866 through its final muster out in 1956, the leadership of the GAR, with the help of the editors of the *Tribune*, emphasized inclusive veteranhood in an attempt to continuously grow the GAR. While “true” veterans favored an exclusive approach to veteranhood, seeking to hold the status that accompanies rarity, the leadership of the GAR preferred inclusivity for the power, politically and socially, that came with a large group. The leadership was not concerned with the status of each individual veteran, but rather with the power that accompanied uniting *all* veterans behind a certain issue, such as the veteran pension.

While the GAR was largely a fraternal organization, the political nature of many of their actions and directives was undeniable. Leadership of the GAR, specifically men in positions of power, along with George E. Lemon and his weekly publication, *The National Tribune*, saw the GAR not only as a group of old veterans, but as a powerful voting bloc. Through the GAR, veterans could be organized to use their numbers to influence elections, and in turn use that influence to control politicians. For the GAR, the more veterans they could add to their roster, the greater their influence would become, therefore the guiding strategy of the GAR throughout their existence was that of expansion.

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<sup>122</sup> “As we have asserted,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), November 15, 1894.

Murray Milner's theory of social status shows that the size of a group affects each individual's share of symbolic capital, but the Grand Army of the Republic adds interesting complication to the idea of "true" veteranhood. While each new member would weaken the individual veteran's claim to symbolic power, it would conversely strengthen the group's ability to command political power. Because the GAR was a political body, meaning they used their numbers to influence politicians, the leadership of the GAR was far less interested in limiting who was and was not considered a "true" veteran. Instead leaders were focused on who could be convinced to become a Grand Army comrade. The leadership of the GAR fought to enlist as many veterans as possible, so long as they were honorably discharged. The political nature of inclusive veteranhood can be seen when looking at *what* veterans were discussing when they argued over veteranhood, and more often than not their arguments involved pensions. This chapter argues that the leadership of the GAR fought against the idea of "true" veteranhood, and instead aimed to achieve political, rather than symbolic, capital through the means of inclusivity and numbers rather than the exclusivity sought by "true" veterans.

## II. Growth

Reading through the pages of the *Tribune* helps to reveal why numbers were so important to the leadership of the GAR. When responding to "shallow thinkers" who demanded "divorcing politics and pensions," the *Tribune* editor responded "Politics in the larger and better sense is the means by which the whole people make known and enforce their wishes in National matters. There always has been politics, there always will be politics, and there always should be politics

about any matter of great moment to many people.”<sup>123</sup> While the author attempted to talk his way around *governmental* politics, claiming, instead, politics in the “larger and better sense,” this statement shows that the editors of the *Tribune* saw the GAR, at the very least, as a powerful organization. Even the language used to describe the desired method of politics was aggressive, saying that they intend “enforce” their will, rather than using a more measured verb, such as “influence” or “guide,” that would imply cooperation as opposed to domination.

The pages of the *National Tribune* provide a lens through which to view the growth of the GAR. George E. Lemon, a veteran of the Civil War, published the first issue of *The National Tribune* in October 1877, and dedicated the paper to veteran issues. But the *Tribune* was never fully separate from the GAR, as historian Stuart McConnell explains: “Lemon sought the patronage of the GAR posts in the first issue of the *National Tribune*, and from 1880 onward he worked ceaselessly to build the order up to fighting strength.”<sup>124</sup> The *Tribune* grew rapidly, claiming 130,000 subscribers in 1887, and a readership of 650,000, and sustained its popularity, claiming still 112,000 subscribers in 1899 as veterans began to die off. To veterans and citizens alike, connection to the GAR was found through the pages of the *Tribune*.<sup>125</sup>

Just as subscriptions to the *Tribune* grew rapidly, so too did the GAR. McConnell describes how, in the year of its founding, 1866, “organizers traversed the Midwest enrolling more than 180,000 veterans. Interest soon spread throughout the North . . . by 1868, the society claimed to have more than 240,000 members.”<sup>126</sup> In two years the GAR developed from a mere

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<sup>123</sup> “Politics and Pensions,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), August 2, 1883.

<sup>124</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 148.

<sup>125</sup> Wallace Evan Davies, *Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veterans’ and Hereditary Organizations in America, 1783-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), 106-107.

<sup>126</sup> Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 108.

idea into a society of nearly a quarter of a million men. But, such success would prove to be fleeting, and membership would soon fall off. Not long after 1868, the GAR membership began to dwindle, hitting a low of 26,899 in 1876.<sup>127</sup> Between 1872 and 1895, a number of changes were made to the rules of the GAR to promote membership, such as allowing an unlimited number of applications, all of which served to make membership in the GAR less exclusive, and help the organization grow.<sup>128</sup> The rule changes worked, and the membership of the GAR began to grow rapidly, and would continue to do so well into the 1880s.

The GAR's preoccupation with numbers and expansion becomes clear when reading through the pages of the *Tribune*. A regular feature of the *Tribune* was a collection of articles entitled "The Grand Army, News from the Departments." This feature reported on the state of affairs in each department, the term GAR members used to describe a state. Included in these articles could be anything from a short description of a new post, or a report on the number of new GAR members enrolled in that department. Regardless of form, the common theme that always tied the articles together was the obsession with growth.

Whenever an article discussed expansion of the GAR, the author employed positive terminology that conveyed enthusiasm, growth was good. In an article describing the increase in membership of the GAR "since the beginning of Commander-in-Chief Van Dervoort's administration," the author described the increase as having been "scarcely short of miraculous."<sup>129</sup> The author's excitement was justified; there was a substantial number of new members. The author continued, "the increase of membership on December 31<sup>st</sup> last, with eight Departments still to hear from, had reached a total of 46,649, and the work of recruiting is still

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<sup>127</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 33.

<sup>128</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 45.

<sup>129</sup> "The Growth of the Grand Army," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), March 15, 1883.

actively progressing.”<sup>130</sup> In 1883, the GAR was achieving exactly its purpose; it was expanding. Though this expansion may have presented an issue for long-term members who enjoyed their increased share of status in the far smaller GAR of the 1870s, the leadership of the GAR valued growth over exclusivity. After all, more members meant control over more votes. This addition of 46,649 votes under the new GAR Commander-in-Chief had the author excited enough to exclaim: “This is what it means to have a leader with ‘headquarters in the saddle!’”<sup>131</sup> For the GAR and its mouthpiece, the recent expansion was a success.

Desire for expansion was not limited to the singular expression cited above. As stated earlier, “News from the Departments” was a regular feature in *The National Tribune*. When a department expanded, it was news. Another article from 1883 highlighted the growth of the GAR in New York, albeit with less fanfare. The article stated “the increase in membership in the Department of New York since last January exceeds 9,000 and the number of Posts is now 406.”<sup>132</sup> An update from Rhode Island showed that even modest gains were considered worthy of reporting: “Slocum Post, No. 10, mustered in nine recruits at its meeting April 15.”<sup>133</sup> Other articles highlighted the promise of growth, such as the following: “Comrade Daniel J. Baur, of Madison, Ohio, writes us that a G.A.R. Post has been organized at that place, with thirty-seven charter members, and there are bright prospects of a large increase of membership.”<sup>134</sup> These examples highlighted the larger trend within *The National Tribune* of a desire and an excitement for a burgeoning membership, and the 1880s were by far the most successful years of the GAR in that regard. At the close of the decade, in 1890, the membership of the GAR peaked at

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<sup>130</sup> “The Growth of the Grand Army,” March 15, 1883.

<sup>131</sup> “The Growth of the Grand Army,” March 15, 1883.

<sup>132</sup> “New York,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), November 1, 1883.

<sup>133</sup> “Rhode Island,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), April 30, 1885.

<sup>134</sup> “Ohio,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), September 27, 1883.

409,489 comrades.<sup>135</sup> Since the previous Presidential election of 1888 consisted of around 11,000,000 votes nationwide, with only a 90,596 vote difference between the two candidates, such a large number of votes was far from inconsequential.<sup>136</sup>

The role of the *Tribune* was not merely limited to reporting the growth of the GAR. Editors at the *Tribune* used the paper to actively encourage practices that lead to growth. In an 1883 article titled “The Right of Blackball,” the author advised readers to be more reserved in their use of the “blackball,” a method by which members of a post could outright refuse the acceptance of a new applicant, with no explanation necessary. The article warned:

One of the chief obstacles with which the Order has had to contend in the past is the idea, more or less prevalent, that it is in some sense exclusive. ... The fact that Mr. So-and-so, who served with distinction in the army and has conducted himself since then as an industrious and law-abiding citizen, is known to have been rejected as a candidate for admission to the Grand Army, naturally deters others from applying for membership. ... For these reasons, it seems clear to us that our comrades of the Order cannot be too careful how they exercise the right of blackball.<sup>137</sup>

By stating that the GAR was not an exclusive society, even though the comrades of the GAR were clearly making it exclusive in practice, the *Tribune* was imposing its own definition of veteranhood on the men of the GAR. For the editors of the *Tribune*, the GAR was meant to be an inclusive group in which all who served were entitled to the status of veteran.

The growth of the GAR cannot be attributed to the *Tribune* alone, however, as the leadership of the GAR also showed a clear desire for continued growth. In a speech delivered to the Grand Army Department of Saratoga, Charles A. Orr, Commander of Chapin Post No. 2 in Buffalo, NY, stressed how important it was to grow their membership. Orr alleged “At present I think there are about 100,000 veterans in this Department, and many of them at some time or

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<sup>135</sup> Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 109.

<sup>136</sup> “Presidential Election of 1888: A Resource Guide,” *Library of Congress, Virtual Programs & Services*, November 30, 2015, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/elections/election1888.html>.

<sup>137</sup> “The Right of Blackball,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), March 15, 1883.

other have belonged to the Grand Army. I want to urge upon you the importance of having these boys reinstated. And it is just as important to get these veterans who have never joined any post to now enlist with us.”<sup>138</sup> Though Orr neglected to explain *why* it was so important to enlist these 100,000 men, his desire to see these new recruits enlisted was clear. Similar to Orr, but on a far smaller scale, Henry Twelvetrees, Commander of the E.A. Kimball Post of the GAR, tried to increase participation in his post by writing to individual members to encourage their involvement. In a surviving example, Twelvetrees wrote to William W. Clarke, a member of his post, “I would like to have you come to Post sometimes. Our members are getting smaller every year and every one counts. We have lost 5 members this year.”<sup>139</sup> To Twelvetrees, as with the rest of the leadership of the GAR, it was important to keep numbers high. Between the *Tribune* and the leadership of the GAR, the comrades were frequently reminded of the importance numbers held within the GAR, usually in similarly vague terms so as to imply that growth was an end in itself.

While expansion was a result to be praised and encouraged, contraction was a result which required explanation. After the GAR saw a decrease in membership in 1893, Commander-in-Chief A.G. Weissert felt compelled to break the news in *The National Tribune*. Weissert stated: “In the returns for December, 1892, there was an increase of 3,000 over the June previous in good standing, and a larger increase was confidently looked for in June, 1893, but the desired result was not obtained. After most earnest efforts made by Headquarters to increase the

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<sup>138</sup> Charles A. Orr, *Address to Department Encampment Grand Army of the Republic Saratoga, June 26-27, 1902* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, Printers, 1903), 7.

<sup>139</sup> Henry Twelvetrees, “Letter to William W. Clarke,” August 13, 1896, William W. Clarke Collection, 1855-1896, MS 2958.1936, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, The New-York Historical Society.

membership in good standing, a loss from June, 1892, of over 2,000 must be reported.”<sup>140</sup>

Weissert was taken aback by the dip in membership, but attempted to dampen the blow by providing his opinion of who exactly these 2,000 men were: “The determination to weed out all members who are practically a dead weight to the Order, together with the pressure in financial matters throughout the country, is, from official reports, largely the cause.”<sup>141</sup> That Weissert felt it necessary to publicly declare and then attempt to explain away a minor reduction in GAR membership exemplifies just how important numbers were to the GAR.

Whether through expansion or contraction, *The National Tribune* made it clear that numbers were important to the GAR’s purposes. And during the 1880s and the 1890s, the GAR was extremely successful in this numbers game, as McConnell explains: “In the thirty-five years between the Grand Review and the turn of the century, the order built the political muscle to make itself heard. With a membership larger than that of all other Union veterans’ groups combined, with a post in almost every Northern town.”<sup>142</sup> Though the size of the GAR may have bothered the “true” veteran, who preferred exclusivity, the leadership’s method for attaining political capital was undeniably successful. As McConnell continues, “the GAR was perhaps the single most powerful political lobby of the age. By 1900 the electorate had chosen only one postwar president who was not a GAR member.”<sup>143</sup> As Janney adds, the GAR “successfully pushed for state-sponsored soldiers’ homes, agitated for land grants for loyal soldiers and their families, secured preferential hiring of veterans in government jobs, and lobbied for ever-more

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<sup>140</sup> A.G. Weissert, “Membership,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), September 7, 1893.

<sup>141</sup> Weissert, “Membership,” September 7, 1893.

<sup>142</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 15.

<sup>143</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 15.

inclusive federal pensions.”<sup>144</sup> Exclusivity may have harbor respect, but inclusivity fosters power.

### III. No “True” Veteran

GAR leaders found the construction of “true” veteranhood problematic. The demand for purity risked alienating possible new GAR members. More importantly, the exclusionary construct bolstered arguments against veteran benefits sought by the GAR, such as the pension. By attempting to restrict “true” veteranhood to a certain class of veterans, i.e. men who enlisted early, served long, and experienced combat, the men who sought this dichotomy put the main goals of the GAR at risk. In a public forum, such as *The National Tribune*, openly addressing this dissension within the ranks proved to be just as much an issue as the dissension itself. If an anti-veteran reader saw the *Tribune* censuring its own kind for disliking a certain class of veteran, that could have added to their anti-veteran argument against pensions. But even with this risk, the *Tribune* and others within the leadership of the GAR felt it necessary to denounce the attempt to create a “true” veteran dichotomy, and instead made a call to its members for unity.

Though the GAR was successful in achieving a large membership for the majority of the late-nineteenth century, there was always a large number of veterans, perhaps as much as half, *not* enlisted in the GAR. Considering the large number of veterans outside of the GAR, fears that the organization would lay claim to an exclusionary definition of veteran, keeping out possible members, were quite legitimate. A large number of veterans, perhaps more than half, never

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<sup>144</sup> Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 109-110.

joined the GAR or other, smaller, veteran's organizations.<sup>145</sup> This data may imply a correlation between the existence of "true" veteranhood and a large population of veterans being disaffected with veteranhood. In a case study of three GAR posts, Stuart McConnell found that of the membership, 76% served one year or longer in the military.<sup>146</sup> Correlation does not prove causation, but the small percentage of later-enlisted soldiers enrolled in the GAR at the very least could have alerted the leadership to the development of a status issue within the ranks.

In order to combat any growing dissension in the ranks of the GAR, the *Tribune* attacked the matter head on. In an article in the February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1898 issue, the author wrote: "There is only one way to win victory in the present bitter fight. That is for all veterans to get together, and stand together under the banner of *The National Tribune*, without regard to political differences or previous conditions. We must present a solid, united front to the common enemy."<sup>147</sup> The "present bitter fight" referenced in the article was that which existed between the "enemy," the anti-veteran men who often wrote for Democratic party newspapers, and the veteran advocates, such as the *Tribune* and the veterans themselves. The author called for a "united front" which encouraged all veterans to work together. As the article progressed, however, the author shifted to a more punitive tone, stating: "this is no time to band words about 'long service and short service,' 'first enlistments and latter-day recruits.'"<sup>148</sup> Here we see the author was directly combating the language of "true" veteranhood, telling veterans not to focus on two tenets of "true" veteranhood, length of service and date of enlistment. The author concluded by preaching unity: "Every man who enlisted in the army, and was honorably discharged, is our comrade, and

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<sup>145</sup> Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 109.

<sup>146</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 68.

<sup>147</sup> "There is Only One Way," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), February 17, 1898.

<sup>148</sup> "There is Only One Way," February 17, 1898.

should stand should to shoulder with us in the fight.”<sup>149</sup> The author used a mixture of militaristic verbiage, including phrases such as “shoulder to shoulder with us in the fight,” and surrounded his criticism with calls for unity, in order to get his point across. There was just enough nostalgia for the days of combat mixed in with his message to make his criticism palatable.

Such explicit objections to “true” veteranhood were also made during GAR encampment speeches. At the Twenty-Fifth Annual Session of the Encampment of the Department of the Potomac, a Grand Army of the Republic gathering, John McElroy, fresh off of his defeat for the Commandership of the Department, delivered the following speech:

This was pre-eminently a time when all comrades should stand solidly together, and present a firm, unbroken front to the organized enemies who were attacking us on all sides. ... We must stop all dissensions, cease all invidious criticisms of one another. That a man once wore the blue of loyalty must be sufficient to make him our comrade and brother, and entitle him to defence at our hands against all his enemies and opposers whatsoever. There had been entirely too much talk of ‘latter-day recruits,’ ‘eleventh-hour men,’ ‘men who only came out to get a big bounty,’ etc. We must stop this among ourselves, and strongly discountenance it in others. A man who enlisted in the United States army at any time during the war did it at great peril to himself, and no amount of money that he may have received could have been compensation.<sup>150</sup>

Here, McElroy voiced much of the same sentiment that was included in the *Tribune* article, but with greater assertion. Perhaps having just lost the Commandership race he felt emboldened to speak out against the ills he was seeing within the GAR. McElroy staunchly demanded his audience “stop all dissensions, cease all invidious criticisms of one another,” and even went so far as to say every GAR man must “strongly discountenance [dissension] in others.” McElroy’s tone was more strident than that of the *Tribune* author. As one of the GAR leaders, McElroy had seen the public infighting within the pages of the *Tribune*, and the private infighting within GAR posts. Regardless of where McElroy encountered this discord, the language he was rejecting,

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<sup>149</sup> “There is Only One Way,” February 17, 1898.

<sup>150</sup> Grand Army of the Republic, *Journal of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Session of the Encampment of the Department of the Potomac, Grand Army of the Republic* (Washington, DC: Gibson Bros., Printers and Bookbinders, 1893), 183-184.

“latter-day recruits,” “eleventh-hour men,” all developed out of the “true” veteran dichotomy. Among the editors of the *Tribune* and the leadership of the GAR, “true” veteranhood was becoming a problem that required addressing.

*The National Tribune* attempted to end the divisiveness within their readership by pairing their explicit warnings with positive stories about men who did not fit within the “true” veteran narrative. The *Tribune*’s most sustained defense of men outside of “true” veteranhood came in the form of a series of articles in February of 1897, beginning with an article titled “A Word of Warning,” on February 11<sup>th</sup>, followed by two articles, both titled “Some More ‘Eleventh-Hour Regiments,’” published February 18<sup>th</sup> and February 25<sup>th</sup>. The first article, “A Word of Warning,” begins as follows: “We want to strongly caution the comrades who are discussing the pension question against this foolish denunciation of short-term men, and the constant harping on ‘big bounties.’”<sup>151</sup> The issue the author addressed here was the proclivity of long service men to claim that they deserved bigger pensions than those of short service men, if indeed short service men deserved pensions at all. The author followed up his cautioning with justification, citing:

The first strong reason against it is that it is furnishing ammunition to the enemy. The soldier-haters are only too glad to have us rave about ‘short-term men who got big bounties and never saw a battle.’ This is playing directly into their hands. It is the most effective work that can be done against pensions in general. Our enemies will not fail to enlarge upon and exaggerate the statements we furnish them, until they can demonstrate to the satisfaction of those who are opposed to all pensions that there was nobody in the army but short-term men, who did no sort of valuable service, and received immense bounties for doing it. Any comrade who reflects can see this at once.<sup>152</sup>

Here, the author specifically appealed to the long service men’s economic self-interest, warning that the arguments of “true” veteranhood would, in turn, be used against them. During the 1890s, the pension system was under constant assault by Democratic party politicians and Democratic

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<sup>151</sup> “A Word of Warning,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), February 11, 1897.

<sup>152</sup> “A Word of Warning,” February 11, 1897.

voters. By criticizing their fellow veterans, “true” veterans appeared to aid those who opposed the pension system. The *Tribune* charged that anti-veteran Democrats could use this infighting, conflate the record of the least deserving veteran with that of all veterans, and cost every man his pension.

After first appealing to the pocketbook of the “true” veteran, the author argued “There is really very little basis for this clamor against short-term men who received big bounties.” The author followed up with four points substantiating his claim: First, “The number of short-term men has been grossly exaggerated.” Second, “the amount of bounties they received has been tremendously overstated.” Third, “The service they rendered has been willfully depreciated.” And fourth, “A very large proportion of the short-term men served more than one enlistment.” To reiterate that later-enlisters did not become rich through enlisting, the author concludes by saying: “The bounties they received were paid in greenbacks worth but 40 cents on the dollar, and really counted very little as an inducement for enlistment, and they all helped a great deal to secure victory.”<sup>153</sup> By picking apart the logic of these arguments against those outside of “true” veteranhood, the author hoped the “clamor” against them would end.

For any “true” veteran who brushed off the author’s claims as baseless, the author followed up with proof. The article noted that “We have often before called attention to one short-term, ‘latter-day,’ ‘eleventh-hour’ regiment as a specimen of the whole and an illustration of the cruelty and injustice of this clamor. This was the 57<sup>th</sup> Mass., one of the very last regiments which Massachusetts sent out.”<sup>154</sup> The author set up his argument so that, if claims about short service regiments were true, then surely the 57<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts had an embarrassing record. But,

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<sup>153</sup> “A Word of Warning,” February 11, 1897.

<sup>154</sup> “A Word of Warning,” February 11, 1897.

of course, that was not the case. As the author explained, “Inside of 11 months after that regiment marched away from Boston it lost 201, out of its original 1,052, killed and 515 wounded, while 37 had starved in rebel prisons and 44 had died of disease. Its total loss in 11 months was 802, or almost exactly four out of every five.”<sup>155</sup> Given that eighty percent of the regiment became casualties of war, no one could argue that “they never saw a battle.” The author then went after the “big bounty” issue, and asked: “Now, supposing that these men did get big bounties—let us admit that they got as much as \$1,000 apiece—about \$400 at present money values—what sort of inducement was that for them to go through what they did?”<sup>156</sup> On this issue the author was on less than solid footing. The men of the 57<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts did receive a large bounty, even if it was in inflated currency, so the author pivoted to the very reasonable argument that a four-hundred-dollar bounty was not much of an incentive for losing one’s life. The author concluded his argument by mentioning the record of the 58<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, which faced similar horrors in their service.

Two regiments did not make up an army, however, and the author was aware of this reality. In the article the author admitted that “the 57<sup>th</sup> and 58<sup>th</sup> Mass. had an unusually severe experience,” but hedged this admission by including that “there were other short-term regiments which suffered nearly as terribly, and every man who enlisted in the Union army at any time—soon or late [sic]—ran every risk of having to go through just such a prolonged hell as they encountered.”<sup>157</sup> Having made his point, the author concluded with the following thoughts:

We really don’t understand that any three-years regiment that went out in 1861 gained the right to sneer at these two ‘eleventh-hour regiments,’ largely made up of boys who were too young to enlist earlier in the war. Yet the survivors of these two regiments, which lost more killed and wounded than the whole American army at Buena Vista, would be put off with about \$5 a month, under the Per Diem Bill, where any man who merely served 60 days during the Mexican War gets

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<sup>155</sup> “A Word of Warning,” February 11, 1897.

<sup>156</sup> “A Word of Warning,” February 11, 1897.

<sup>157</sup> “A Word of Warning,” February 11, 1897.

\$8 a month. ... They simply did their duty where their superior officers placed them, just as every other regiment which was enrolled did. Those which got off with less loss simply had good luck, nothing more.”<sup>158</sup>

The author ended the article with the idea that not only could these constructed categories be used against any veteran, they were likely inaccurate, and needed to stop.

The editors of the *Tribune* ran two additional articles, both titled “Some More ‘Eleventh-Hour Regiments.’”<sup>159</sup> In these two articles, the *Tribune* focused on showing the number of “eleventh-hour regiments” that had shown valor in their service. The article from February 18<sup>th</sup> reasserted the service of the 57<sup>th</sup> and 58<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, and then stated “Let us cite a few more of them... It will be seen at once that there were surprisingly few of these regiments which did not have a sharp taste of battle, and an equally-astonishingly large proportion which suffered losses equal if not greater than the average among the earlier regiments. That they all did not was simply the chance of war.”<sup>160</sup> Similarly, the article included in the February 25<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Tribune* opened with the line, “The numerous instances we have already given of desperate fighting and heavy losses of regiments which came out during the last months of the war by no means exhausted the list.”<sup>161</sup> These two articles indeed cited many more brave regiments; the February 18<sup>th</sup> article focused on regiments from the Eastern states, and the article from February 25<sup>th</sup> described regiments from the Western states. These articles served to strengthen the argument of the original article, “A Word of Warning,” by showing the Massachusetts regiments were not exceptions.

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<sup>158</sup> “A Word of Warning,” February 11, 1897.

<sup>159</sup> Though these articles share the same title, they are distinct in their content.

<sup>160</sup> “Some More ‘Eleventh-Hour Regiments,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), February 18, 1897.

<sup>161</sup> “Some More ‘Eleventh-Hour Regiments,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), February 25, 1897.

Recognizing that regardless of how many upstanding “eleventh-hour regiments” the editors of the *Tribune* could point to, there would always be examples of negative regiments, both articles ended in a similar fashion as the first, highlighting the role of luck. After reasserting “when a man is casting slurs on the ‘latter-day, big-bounty men,’ he simply does not know what he is talking about,” the article of the 25<sup>th</sup> conceded that “it is true that a number of these regiments saw little or no fighting and suffered but slightly,” before ending with the issue of luck: “the undeniable fact is that a majority of them got into as hard fighting as there was during the war ... Those which did not simply had that luck.”<sup>162</sup> The February 18<sup>th</sup> article ended with essentially the same message, that “the few who got off with small or no loss merely had good luck.”<sup>163</sup> By noting the factor that luck played in determining who fought and died during the war, the *Tribune* shifted the blame away from the remaining short-service men whose service record was weak, protecting them from the ire of the “true” veteran.

The efforts of the *Tribune* in publishing these articles is justified when put the frequency of attacks against short-service men in context. Printed on the same page as the February 18<sup>th</sup> article “Some More ‘Eleventh-Hour Regiments” was a letter to the editor entitled “Wants the Per Diem Bill.” In this letter, O.M. Allen of the 151<sup>st</sup> New York wrote:

I desire, with others, to express through the columns of *The National Tribune*, my view of the Service Pension Bill ... A man volunteers in 1861 or 1862 for three years for \$100 bounty and \$13 per month. Serves in the field in hard marches and exposures by day and by night, in many hard-fought battles, and finally, after years of such service, is wounded and sent to the hospital, being discharged therefrom on account of wounds received in action ... (has to live off of paltry \$8 per month) On the other side of the question, a man in the later years of the war enlists for, say, nine months for \$1,500 bounty and \$16 per month, goes on an excursion at Uncle Sam’s expense as far as Washington ... He then receives his discharge and returns home, much benefited by his short vacation and outing, and under the \$8-bill receives the same pension as the long-

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<sup>162</sup> “Some More ‘Eleventh-Hour Regiments,” February 25, 1897.

<sup>163</sup> “Some More ‘Eleventh-Hour Regiments,” February 18, 1897.

service disabled man does. This would illustrate the case of thousands should that bill pass. It is very hard for me to see any justice in it.<sup>164</sup>

While the editors of the *Tribune* are to be commended for their refusal to censor the contributions of its readership, the more pertinent point made by Allen in this article was just how prevalent the aspersions were against those outside of the “true” veteran ideology. In the same issue, on the very same page as an article defending short-service men, there was also a letter written in about the short-service man, accusing him of the same faults just refuted by the author of the “Some More ‘Eleventh-Hour Regiments” articles.

The idea of “true” veteranhood was antithetical to all that GAR leaders hoped to achieve. To allow this idea to flourish within the veteran community, and even the public at large, would be dangerous to the image of veteranhood that the GAR, and its mouthpiece, *The National Tribune*, sought to propagate. In order to fight against “true” veteranhood, and the divisive nature of creating a class system among veterans, leadership of the GAR warned their comrades against such behavior in speeches, and the editors of the *Tribune* warned readers through their paper. But the leadership and editors were not the only people during this time who had a stake in inclusive veteranhood. The “late-enlister,” the “short-service man,” “the big bounty mercenary,” indeed all the men who did not fit into the constructed idea of “true” veteranhood made their voices heard in the public arena, and wrote their own responses to the smears levied against their name.

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<sup>164</sup> O.M. Allen, “Wants the Per Diem Bill,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), February 18, 1897.

#### IV. No “False” Veteran

The goal of the GAR was to be inclusive of all veterans, and though this inclusivity undoubtedly stemmed partially from a belief in fraternity, it was also a matter of numbers and power. In order to achieve this inclusivity, it was important to foster an environment in which all veterans felt welcome. The prevalence of “true” veteranhood, however, and with it the implication that certain veterans were worthier than others, threatened the organization’s goal of inclusivity. GAR leadership could make speeches, and the *Tribune* could run articles reprimanding divisive behavior, but for maligned veterans the options for publicly defending themselves were limited. For the comrades outside of “true” veteranhood, letters to the editor of *The National Tribune* offered a soapbox from which he could voice his defense.

Many of the veterans writing in to the *Tribune* to defend their service did so briefly, likely out of a feeling of unease over having to defend the manner in which they went off to war and risked their lives. W.H. Walters, for example, wrote simply: “I think I speak the sentiment of the survivors when I say we are not ashamed of our record even if we are classed with the ‘last call big bounty men.’”<sup>165</sup> Others, such as Charles A. Linn, explained that he, like many other later-enlisting veterans, was “too young to enlist in the United States volunteer service at the outbreak of the rebellion, but did noble work as home guards in resisting the invasions of John Morgan and other rebel guerrillas up to the Fall of 1864.”<sup>166</sup> When finally of eligible age to join the military, he “enlisted in the United States service on Oct. 25, 1864.”<sup>167</sup> These men, like many

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<sup>165</sup> W.H. Walters, “Last Call Men,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), October 8, 1891.

<sup>166</sup> Charles A. Linn, “Short Term Men,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), December 2, 1909.

<sup>167</sup> Linn, “Short Term Men,” December 2, 1909.

others, seemed to have no interest in making a long and drawn out argument about their value, and instead included short statements within longer writings, making it clear they were not embarrassed by their service.

Other men defended their service in long form. J.F. Rowell, a soldier who served for nine months during the war, began his defense:

I have been very much amused at the controversies of our veterans. Some of them reminds one of the story Paddy told of himself. His General called out: 'Is Tim Donnelly present?' 'I'm here, sur.' 'Then let the battle begin.' Didn't the most of us feel as if every individual shot or shell was aimed specially at us, to the entire neglect of anyone else? ... The writer did; but as a nine-months man, perhaps he wasn't long enough there to know what hearty vittles were.<sup>168</sup>

Rowell opened with sarcasm, highlighting the self-importance of certain veterans, and rejecting the idea that nine-months men knew nothing of the war. He continued:

However, there were various occasions when the boys felt as if it was hardly good to be there. And if there are any of the vets who look down with a 'seven-storied disdain' on a 'nine-months' man,' I would ask him if, during that universal period of gloom and disaster in the Fall of '62, he was glad to see us coming 300,000 strong, and if the turning of the tide the following Spring, with the magnificent victories of Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Port Hudson, ... could possibly have been won without the help they gave in battle and in garrison?<sup>169</sup>

Clearly bothered by the lack of respect given to the "nine-months' man," Rowell made the case that rather than be looked down upon by the long-service vet, he should instead be thanked, as he and his fellow "nine-months' men" came to the rescue in numerous battles.

Having made his case for the value of his service, Rowell moved on to what appears to be his biggest grievance, the idea that the service of "nine-months' men" was done only for the money:

Occasionally some bumper could call them 'nine-months' mercenaries.' Let us see. It is true we got \$13 per month, and as a good proportion were men of family, the towns voted to pay them \$100 each, so that their wives and little ones might not starve in their absence. So the balance-sheet stands thus: They got for nine months' service, including wages and bounties, \$217, for which we will debit them with the addition of all other emoluments in shape of privation, sickness, death and disease. By staying at home they could get, first, a divided country, an

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<sup>168</sup> J.F. Rowell, "A Wandering Comrade," *The National Tribune* (June 17, 1886).

<sup>169</sup> Rowell, "A Wandering Comrade," June 17, 1886.

average of not less than \$30 per month, many in the hundreds. Oh, boys! What's the use of reciting it? We were undoubtedly 'mercenaries.' To be sure, if we had stayed at home, we shouldn't in many cases have got the wounds to exhibit proudly, nor we couldn't have got the fellow-feeling that we have to-day for every old soldier who did his work faithfully. 'Mercenaries!' step forward: let's hear from you.<sup>170</sup>

After he made it quite clear that joining the military was no financial boon, and that much more profit could have been had at home, Rowell's predilection for sarcasm again shone through, as he claimed "We were undoubtedly 'mercenaries.'" In what was perhaps his sharpest line, Rowell's facetiously wrote, "To be sure, if we had stayed home ... we couldn't have got the fellow-feeling that we have to-day for every soldier who did his work faithfully." Rowell's clear expression of isolation within the veteran community is palpable, almost as if he used sarcasm to keep his deeper emotions at a distance.

Rowell ended his letter by writing "The writer's regiment served 11 months and 10 days without complaint, and its quota from our town lost in killed more than a third of the whole number killed from the town during the war, so we are not ashamed of our record," almost bitterly including how many men of the regiment were lost.<sup>171</sup> That Rowell's letter was laced with emotion is not surprising. No military service during the Civil War was easy, so for that service to be criticized by a fellow veteran must have been painful. Often times when short-service men were defending their service, their words conveyed a deep sense of frustration that such a practice was necessary.

Other veterans also argued for their honor. In 1897 A.S. Peare wrote into the *Tribune* to contest the "eleventh-hour man" label. Peare wrote, "I was a member of Co. D, 32<sup>nd</sup> Me., and I think we had a pretty hard time of it while it lasted, as much so as those who served longer."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Rowell, "A Wandering Comrade," June 17, 1886.

<sup>171</sup> Rowell, "A Wandering Comrade," June 17, 1886.

<sup>172</sup> A.S. Peare, "An 'Eleventh-Hour Man' Speaks," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), April 9, 1897.

Much as Rowell did, Peare focused on the number of men lost in order to substantiate his claim. Peare added “In the history of the corps the loss for the months of May and June, 1864, was for the 31<sup>st</sup>, 159; 32d, 161; that is, killed and wounded. I have seen my company when there was only six privates and one Corporal, with a Sergeant in command. The two regiments were so small that six months after leaving the State they were consolidated.”<sup>173</sup> While Peare felt the need to prove that he was no one’s lesser, he also wrote, “I think we got ‘hot stuff,’ and lots of it. I have been a sufferer from that time to the present, and must be to the end.” Peare had no desire to claim more for himself than anyone else, as he concluded his letter: “I would not detract one iota from the long-time men, but I do think some of those who served but a short time had as hard a time as some of those who served longer.”<sup>174</sup> Peare sought only recognition of his contribution, but not all were so equitably minded.

After seeing many negative letters to the editor in the *Tribune*, most of which depicted short-service men in a negative light, and noticing that “the great majority of [these letters] are from old veterans,” Henry M. Cooke decided to take action. Coming to his own defense, and the defense of his fellow besmirched short-service veterans, Cooke proclaimed boldly: “I say that it required more nerve to go and enlist in the latter part of the war than in 1861, before a battle had been fought and the men did not know anything about war.”<sup>175</sup> Here, Cooke reframed the argument. Rather than defend his service, he attacked the service of early enlisters. Cooke claimed that the later-enlisted man signed up out of bravery, while the early-enlisted man did so out of ignorance. And Cooke had a point. The Northern public had expected a quick war in 1861,

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<sup>173</sup> Peare, “An ‘Eleventh-Hour Man’ Speaks,” April 9, 1897.

<sup>174</sup> Peare, “An ‘Eleventh-Hour Man’ Speaks,” April 9, 1897.

<sup>175</sup> Henry M. Cooke, “A Short Service Man,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), February 11, 1897.

but subsequently learned that would not be the case. When the war proved to be long, and casualty rates high, fewer men were willing to fight, which in part led to the 1863 the Enrollment Act, creating the much loathed “big-bounty men.” In that regard, men like Cooke were enlisting at a time when many men were unwilling to do the same, a strong defense regarding the dedication of a later-enlisted man.

Later in his letter, Cooke explained how the lack of an inclusive environment within the GAR kept him out of the society for some time, proving the fears of the GAR and the *Tribune* to be correct. As Cooke described it: “I stayed out of the G.A.R. for years because I was one who went out in the last year of the war.”<sup>176</sup> Just as the leadership of the GAR and the editors at the *Tribune* had warned, men such as Cooke felt unwelcome in a society that had created a hierarchical system in which later-enlisted and short-service men occupied lower status. Men like Cooke justified the efforts of the GAR and the *Tribune* to focus on fostering a more inclusive environment within the veteran community.

And indeed, through his letter, Cooke also confirmed the GAR and *Tribune*’s initiatives as he explained what eventually persuaded him to join the Grand Army. Said Cooke, “The Commander of our Post came to me with a few words that were encouraging. He said that he had great respect for the boys who went out at the last; that they were brave, and well knew that it was not play to go to war.”<sup>177</sup> The encouragement of Cooke’s post commander was in direct accord with the advice that had long been given by the *Tribune* and the GAR leadership. Take, for example, George T. Hodges’ speech, delivered to members of the Department of Louisiana and Mississippi, in which he advised: “There are many old soldiers and sailors who are eligible

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<sup>176</sup> Cooke, “A Short Service Man,” February 11, 1897.

<sup>177</sup> Cooke, “A Short Service Man,” February 11, 1897.

to join our ranks and if you show but a little interest that they should, you will be met more than halfway. ... In this way will the Post rooms become the attractive recruiting office, and your membership and prosperity increased.”<sup>178</sup> Similarly, the *Tribune* offered the following advice: “Some remain outside the Order because of short service. Let such be advised that an honorable discharge is all that is necessary for membership, and many men who served well for 90 days may have done as much good to the country as those who have a record of four years.”<sup>179</sup> Both of these initiatives stressed the importance of including men who felt unwelcome within the veteran ranks. Cooke, through his willingness to get involved in the GAR after the encouragement of his post commander, clearly demonstrates the efficacy of such initiatives.

Though successful, the initiatives of the *Tribune* and the GAR to honor those outside of the “true” veteran ideal were also transparently self-serving. In Hodges’ speech, he concluded by noting the benefit of increased membership and prosperity, but did not mention any fraternal benefits of adding members. The kind words towards short-service men in the *Tribune* did not contain such a blatant ulterior motive, but the overall record of the *Tribune* implied as much. Quotations such as the following, “If we can show that we are speaking in the name of a quarter of a million comrades actually on our subscription rolls, there is nothing that is right that we cannot get for the comrades,”<sup>180</sup> were commonplace within the *Tribune*. To the *Tribune* numbers always equated to power. But men beneath the prestige of “true” veteranhood were not pawns to all; later-enlisted and short service men also found support from men who stood to gain little

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<sup>178</sup> George T. Hodges, *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Encampment of the Department of Louisiana and Mississippi, Grand Army of the Republic* (New Orleans, LA: Patterson & Ray, Printers, 1891), 12.

<sup>179</sup> “Headquarters News,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), November 3, 1892.

<sup>180</sup> “Forward Once More,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), November 15, 1894.

from their acceptance: their fellow veterans who cared more for fraternity and fairness than they did status and symbolic capital.

## V. Defending Their Own

For the seeming majority of veterans, veteranhood was meant to be inclusive. The GAR, *The National Tribune*, veterans who enlisted late and/or served short terms, they all battled against the constructing of “true” veteranhood. Even some men who could have been considered in the “true” veteran class instead preferred a more inclusive definition of veteranhood. These men had two methods of making their positions known in the public forum provided by the *Tribune*, either by explicitly criticizing the stratification of veteranhood, or implicitly lending their support to *all* veterans. Men who had the status of a “true” veteran, but did not adhere to the status hierarchy of veteranhood, played an important role in attempting to create an inclusive environment for all veterans. These men were able to play this role because of their symbolic capital, and because they focused on fraternity.

The most common method for veterans to defend those outside of the “true” veteran category was through implicit acceptance. Rather than outright defending the service of veterans who enlisted late, or served for a short time, these veterans would instead defend *all* veterans as deserving. An illustrative example of the tentative nature of such implicit endorsements can be seen in the men of the Bufort Post in Nebraska, who published the following announcement in the *Tribune*: “Bufort Post, of Central City, Neb., has unanimously indorsed The National Tribune service pension bill. It has a membership of 60 in good standing, a large majority of whom are long term veterans who recognize the fact that whoever offered his life upon his country’s altar is

deserving of recognition to-day on the pension list.”<sup>181</sup> First, feeling the need to establish their status, they noted that their membership was “in good standing” and that “a large majority” of the members were “long term veterans.” Interestingly, these men were putting their value on their record as *veterans* rather than their record as *soldiers*. With their status established, these men then approved of the *National Tribune* service pension bill, which would allow every man that served a minimum of ninety days to receive a pension. Their justification for this support being that “whoever offered his life upon his country’s altar is deserving of recognition,” which, of course, included short-service men just as it did long-term men. Though not exactly a ringing endorsement for short-service men specifically, the language used by the author was that of fraternity, making it clear that no veteran deserved to be left out of his just reward.

Other veterans employed similar language to establish the same encouragement for inclusivity without including more explicit endorsement. In this implicit vein, R.C. Way did not mention short-service by name, but conveyed the idea of inclusion in his letter to the editor: “I am heartily in sympathy with the idea, as often expressed by the loyal people, who realize what a debt we owe to the veterans, now so rapidly ‘mustered out,’ that every loyal veteran should have a pension.”<sup>182</sup> The key word in Way’s statement was “every,” a qualifier that served to establish that there were no exceptions to the veterans he was discussing. As Way described it, all were deserving: “He took the chances of a death on the battlefield, or in the loathsome prison, or being wounded or broken in health, to return, only to drag out a miserable existence, a heritage of pain and shattered nerves, left him from the hardships and exposures of a soldier’s life.”<sup>183</sup> Here Way touched on what most said about short-service men when defending them. In enlisting for the

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<sup>181</sup> “Service Pension,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), August 27, 1903.

<sup>182</sup> R.C. Way, “Honor the Veterans,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), January 2, 1896.

<sup>183</sup> Way, “Honor the Veterans,” January 2, 1896.

war, they took on the greatest risk possible, death. Such a risk taken during war deserved a reward during peace. Way ended by driving home one final time just how high the stakes were for soldiers during the Civil War: “Hence I say honor the veterans, and give expression to the gratitude a loyal nation feels in the knowledge that her sons were true and brave, even unto death.”<sup>184</sup>

That the Bufort Post, R.C. Way, and other veterans like them lent their support only implicitly was likely the result of the contested value of non-“true” veterans. Later-enlisted and short-service men were clearly the recipients of harassment, and just as it is a precarious situation to defend the bullied student at school, lest one risks getting bullied oneself, other veterans may have feared supporting the short-service man for fear of ridicule for standing up for an “undeserving” group. Not all were dissuaded, however. Other veterans overtly supported the short-service man, and were unapologetic about doing so.

W.T. Stewart was open and succinct in his support for short-service men. “I for one think it is time to bury the hatchet of distinction between long-service or short-service as far as bravery is concerned or as far as motives are concerned,” Stewart wrote, “The bravest charge I ever saw was by a regiment that never saw a fight before.”<sup>185</sup> Far from implicit, Stewart could not have been more unambiguous in his praise of the lamented short-service man. That Stewart was willing to imply that valor and bravery were not born from wartime experience put him in direct contention with the “true” veterans, who so highly valued time served. It does not appear that Stewart faced any backlash to his comments, at least in the pages of the *Tribune*, but his

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<sup>184</sup> Way, “Honor the Veterans,” January 2, 1896.

<sup>185</sup> W.T. Stewart, “California,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), March 25, 1897.

willingness to take an opinion that some would view as problematic shows his readiness to stick up for the short-service man.

Others also took up the mantle for short-service men. When calling for unity, C.W. McLaughlin wrote: “The bullet that would kill a veteran of four years would just as quickly kill a 90 days man. Life is as sweet to a 90 days man as any other.”<sup>186</sup> In another letter, S.W. Bird advised, “Let us not at this late day attempt to build a fence between ourselves and those who came in at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. I’ve read of an instance where those coming in at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour received every man his penny, same as those who were hired earlier.”<sup>187</sup> Supportive statements of unity such as these were a veteran’s best way to show his support so that all short-service men could see it.

In one case, *The National Tribune* featured an open letter to Union veteran Henry Clay Evans, the Treasury Department’s Commissioner of Pensions, questioning why he was not coming to the defense of short-term veterans. In the open letter, the author wrote:

Sir: Still the veterans have heard no word of comfort and cheer from you—no rebuke to the calumnies of their enemies. It is true that of late none of their assailants have been claiming to get their figures directly from you. This is some gain, but it is very far short of what veterans feel that they have a right to expect from you. ... All on the pension roll, or outside of it, are branded alike. Ten thousand words are written about ‘deserters,’ ‘bounty-jumpers,’ ‘coffee-coolers,’ ‘shirks,’ ‘men who never saw a battle,’ ‘big-bounty men,’ etc., etc., where one is spoken of the brave deeds and unselfish sacrifices of the men who put down the rebellion. ... It is every American’s patriotic duty to foster a healthy public spirit in all ways that he can. Your official position makes this duty particularly incumbent upon you.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> C.W. McLaughlin, “Service Pension,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), April 30, 1903.

<sup>187</sup> S.W. Bird, “United We Stand, Divided We Fall,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), August 12, 1886. The odd phrasing in Bird’s quotation, “those coming in at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour received every man his penny,” is a biblical reference to Matthew 20:1-16. The verse is a parable about a group of laborers who agree to a day’s labor for one penny. After the others were working for eleven hours, a new set of laborers are also hired. At day’s end, all men get a penny, but this is seen as unfair by the laborers who had been working all day, to which the employer responds, “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?”

<sup>188</sup> “An Open Letter,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), February 3, 1898.

Evans' position of authority made his silence with regard to the criticisms of those on the pension roll especially egregious. The author felt that, as Commissioner of Pensions, it was Evans' job to come to the defense of pensioners, and that as a veteran Evans knew the claims against pensioners were fabricated. The author's anger over fabrication came into greater clarity as the article continued:

You know—for you cannot help knowing—that all this pother about deserters is the veriest bosh. Really, the deserters did not average 4 in 100, and 96 per cent of the men who enlisted served faithfully to the end. You know—for you cannot help knowing—that the furore about bounty-jumpers is even more silly. There was not one bounty-jumper among 1,000 soldiers. You know—for you cannot help knowing—that the clamor about 100-days men is absurd. There were but 83,612 of these all told, or but one in every 33 enlistments. They rendered very good service during their 100 days.<sup>189</sup>

Here the author debunked the claims against the veterans one by one, showing there were few deserters, and almost no bounty jumpers. When it came to 100-days men, the *Tribune* discounted their extent, while defending their honor, saying that their service was of value. Due to Evans' authority over the pension roll, the author felt he should be defending such men as well. In his final defense of the veterans, the author turned toward the tactic that so many also employed when defending veterans, discussing the dead: “one man out of every five who put on the blue was dead before they took it off again; that of the remaining four at least two were wounded or disabled by disease and hardships. . . . We claim, with the utmost earnestness, that it is high time that the Pension Bureau should begin telling the other side of the story.”<sup>190</sup> For the *Tribune*, as for so many others, any soldier who enlisted risked death, and that risk was the clearest rebuke to any insult against his honor.

It should be noted that this latest example differed slightly from those previous. In “An Open Letter,” the *Tribune* was asking Evans to defend *all* veterans, not just those outside of

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<sup>189</sup> “An Open Letter,” February 3, 1898.

<sup>190</sup> “An Open Letter,” February 3, 1898.

“true” veteranhood. This change in tactics from the *Tribune* was due to the fact that Evans was responding to threats not from within, from the veterans themselves, but from without, from the public. Though infighting was a big problem for veteranhood, it was not the sole problem. As pensions rose, so too did public frustration. By 1900 every third dollar the United States government spent was on veteran pensions.<sup>191</sup> For some members of the public, this expense was more than they were willing to bear, and it became their aim to put an end to it.

## VI. One Last Battle

To many in the public, veterans and their pensions were an albatross. Pensions were expensive, and the fact that they were so expensive forty-five years after the fighting had ended made them hard to justify for some members of the public, specifically Democratic voters. The main strategy that anti-veteran and anti-pension members of the public employed in attempting to end the pension system was to attack the veterans themselves. If these anti-veteran citizens could make a case that the veterans who were receiving pension were undeserving, then perhaps the expensive pension system could be dismantled. Provided a new enemy, the veterans of the Civil War prepared for battle.

When veterans claimed they were under attack from ungrateful members of the public, they were more or less correct. Certain newspapers, such as the New York’s *The Sun*, were notoriously harsh on the veteran, specifically when it came to pensions. Many articles suggested that numerous pensioners submitted fraudulent claims. The 1897 article, “More Pensioned ‘Survivors’ Than There Are Survivors,” told readers “The pension rolls show that 733,527

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<sup>191</sup> McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 15.

persons are drawing pensions from the Government as survivors of the war of the rebellion. That is, 6,405 more ‘survivors’ are drawing pensions than there are actual survivors; a fraud on its face.”<sup>192</sup> Throughout the pages of similar publications, and from the mouths of citizens who shared this sentiment, the veterans felt attacked, and fought back.

In response to the resistance of the anti-veteran public, many veterans employed the same militaristic language as they did when engaging in politics. The editors of the *Tribune* alerted their readership that “*The National Tribune* still continues to fight the battles of the veterans alone and single-handed among the great papers of the country. ... *The National Tribune* is furnishing all the ammunition fired in defense, and it is gratified by the way that its arguments, facts and statistics are used to refute the calumnies of our enemies.”<sup>193</sup> Just as politicians were “enemies,” so too were the public who spoke ill of the veterans, and they were to be met with “ammunition” provided by the *Tribune*.

Individual veterans engaged in said militaristic rhetoric as well, such as Caleb A. Lamb, when he wrote: “I am an old soldier, older in army experience than most of my comrades—for I have been in the United States service more or less since 1847—but when such papers as the *Chicago Times*, *New York Sun*, and *Rutland Herald* cast slurs at our veterans, I feel like buckling on my belt again and going out to finish the war.”<sup>194</sup> Though Lamb was speaking only figuratively when he described his desire to again buckle his belt and end the war, the aggression of his language was unmistakable. Similarly, W.A. North wrote in to the *Tribune*, thanking them for their defense of the veteran, “Having been a constant reader of the *National Tribune* ever

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<sup>192</sup> “More Pensioned ‘Survivors’ Than There Are Survivors,” *The Sun* (New York, NY), December 20, 1897.

<sup>193</sup> “The National Tribune,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), February 3, 1898.

<sup>194</sup> Caleb A. Lamb, “Shoulder to Shoulder,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), March 1, 1883.

since it was started, I must say that it is the only fearless publication that it has been my lot to read. It is the only true friend the soldier has.”<sup>195</sup> Signing off, North added “I hope you will continue with your Gatlin guns, double-shotted.” Like Lamb, North made debate synonymous with warfare.<sup>196</sup> Not all military analogies were quite as violent. Wm. Linderman compared veterans resisting anti-veteran attacks to a line of defense, when he wrote “I do not think the newspaper attacks on our veterans can do us any harm, providing we stick together and stand by The Tribune and the old flag. Keep your lines well dressed, and, with forty rounds of cartridge in your box, you will come out all right yet.”<sup>197</sup> For these veterans, engaging with an ungrateful public was just the continuation of battle.

The leadership of the GAR, having shown such proclivity for power, would not take such an affront to their status without responding. In 1899, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, Albert D. Shaw gave a speech to the GAR Department of New York, in which he explained why the pension system was so expensive. According to Shaw:

The reason why the policy of granting pensions to our volunteers has been so generous is because the veterans who saved the Union by their services and sacrifices were worthy of liberal pensions, when disease, poverty and helpless declining years made such pensions necessary. The richest nation in the world can well afford to pension those who were deserving and needy, and whose patriotism provided armies and a navy greater than any regular standing army ever before brought into service in a nation’s defense.<sup>198</sup>

Shaw’s argument contained essentially two points: that the veterans earned their pensions as young soldiers, and that the country could afford to pay the pensions. Rather than engaging with

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<sup>195</sup> W.A. North, “The Only Fearless Advocate,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), January 2, 1896.

<sup>196</sup> North, “The Only Fearless Advocate,” January 2, 1896.

<sup>197</sup> Wm. Linderman, “Shoulder to Shoulder,” *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), March 1, 1883.

<sup>198</sup> Albert D. Shaw, *The Question of Pensions* (Watertown, NY: Hungerford-Holbrook Co., 1899), 6.

the more venomous rhetoric put out by the anti-veteran public, Shaw began his speech by calmly asserting a reasonable argument for why the pensions were reasonable.

After President Theodore Roosevelt's Executive Order Seventy-Eight in 1904, which ruled that every veteran aged sixty-two or older would be eligible for a pension, A.J. Ogle wrote in to the *Tribune* in an effort to justify the ruling.<sup>199</sup> In the article, titled "Relative Smallness of Pension Expenditures," Ogle first tried to put the expense of the pension in perspective, writing: "An annual appropriation of \$15,000,000 would only be one and a half per cent of a billion-dollar Congress, and when compared with the aggregate wealth of our Nation it becomes an infinitesimal item of disbursement."<sup>200</sup> By noting the wealth of the nation, Ogle was presenting an argument very similar to Shaw's, essentially putting forward that so long as the nation could afford it, it should not be an issue. Ogle continued along similar lines as Shaw, highlighting the deserving nature of the veterans,

This vast sum of National wealth, as well as the present exalted prestige of our Nation, are largely due to the patriotic sacrifices and arduous services of the veterans, cheerfully rendered to preserve the integrity of the Union, and for which trying service they received about \$7 a month, county money on a gold basis. This meager compensation was not equivalent for the more profitable vocations they abandoned when they enlisted.<sup>201</sup>

Though similar to Shaw in that the focus was on the veterans meriting their pensions, Ogle took it a step further by attributing the wealth of the nation to the veteran's success during the Civil War. Ogle argued, essentially, such wealth would not have existed without the efforts of the veterans, therefore they were entitled to a share of it.

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<sup>199</sup> William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1918), 248-249.

<sup>200</sup> A.J. Ogle, "Relative Smallness of Pension Expenditures," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), May 9, 1907.

<sup>201</sup> Ogle, "Relative Smallness of Pension Expenditures," May 9, 1907.

Ogle's final point addressed the allegations that Union soldiers only fought to line their pockets, allegations which stemmed from the large bounties that resulted from the Enrollment Act of 1863. Ogle countered:

The motives which actuated them [soldiers] were not the hopes of paltry gain, as a money consideration, but that sterling sentiment of a lofty patriotism which inspires men to heroic deeds of gallantry in defense of the sacred rights of liberty and the principles of free Government. The infamous insinuation that the veterans enlisted from mercenary motives comes from withered souls, too sordid to appreciate true Americanism, poor, pitiful creatures with blighted souls.<sup>202</sup>

By reinforcing that soldiers went off to war with only patriotism in their heart, and not dollar signs in their eyes, Ogle strengthened his claims that the country owed the brave men of '61-'65 because those men sacrificed for their country. Gratitude towards a friend doing you a favor is far larger than toward a hired laborer. Ogle was not alone in taking umbrage with the idea that soldiers were mere mercenaries.

In a Memorial Day Address cited by *The National Tribune*, W.H. Smith said of the claims that soldiers cared for nothing more than money, "Of the motives that actuated the defenders of the Union, it is hardly necessary here to speak. Certainly ours were not mercenary soldiers."<sup>203</sup> Then, in order to refute the claims that the soldiers merely saw the war as a great opportunity for profit, Smith provided a detailed explanation of all the duties the soldiers had perform, and what they earned for performing them:

The thirteen dollars a month and insignificant bounty would never pay a man for the hardships of the camp and fatigue of the march, to say nothing of the dangers of battle. Would any one of you, my hearers, leave your homes and sleep out in all kinds of weather—in drenching rain, in driving sleet under a torrid sun and amid the blasts of winter—for any amount of money? Or could compensation enough be offered to induce you to shoulder a weight of sixty to eighty pounds burden, converting yourself into a veritable pack-mule, and march through mud and slush, or blinding dust, by day and by night, in sunshine and in storm, through valleys and over mountains, and across swamps and through rivers?<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Ogle, "Relative Smallness of Pension Expenditures," May 9, 1907.

<sup>203</sup> W.H. Smith, "Not Mercenary," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), August 9. 1883.

<sup>204</sup> Smith, "Not Mercenary," August 9. 1883.

While Smith ignored that the bounties grew to a level that *was* significant, he was arguing that the work of the soldier was so arduous that it would not matter how much they were paid, it would never be a valuable trade-off. Others echoed Smith's point, such as the veteran identified as "M.C.," when he wrote to the *Tribune*, "I know that I but voice the sentiment of every one-armed and one-legged soldier when I say that though we do not regret for a moment the sacrifice which we were called upon to make for the Union, yet were it in the power of the Government to give back that which we lost, every pension certificate would be promptly surrendered."<sup>205</sup> Smith and M.C. made sound arguments. Military service was brutal even when soldiers made it out of the service without getting wounded or losing a limb, and, besides, as Smith asked in closing, "overlooking the dangers of war, was there a man in all the vast armies of the Union who could not have earned more money at home and in an easier manner?"<sup>206</sup> Smith's point reflected the strong wartime economy and countered the arguments of exclusionists.

While veterans objected to accusations of greediness, they also bristled at charges that their enlistment was not motivated by patriotism. In response to anti-veteran claims that it was not for love of country that men to enlisted, but mere love of adventure, M.P. Kent wrote:

It makes my blood boil when I read in some of the anti-soldier papers that it was not the spirit of loyalty which prompted the soldier to leave the pursuits of peace and hasten to the field of carnage and death, but the love of adventure and excitement. When I look back twenty years and more to the date of my enlistment, and ask myself whether it was the love of adventure which prompted me to leave my home, I remember that I then had a faithful and loving companion whose society was dear to me, and that my first born was but three weeks old. It was hard to sever those ties, yet, when I heard of the defeat of our armies, the revolutionary spirit leaped to life again, and I said, 'my country calls me, and I will go,' I served four years, and came home so much impaired in health that I was obliged to apply for a pension. After fifteen years, I received a pension of \$4 per month, yet some will say, I suppose, that I am a fraud.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> M.C., "Shoulder to Shoulder," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), March 1, 1883.

<sup>206</sup> Smith, "Not Mercenary," August 9, 1883.

<sup>207</sup> M.P. Kent, "Shoulder to Shoulder," *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), March 1, 1883.

For many veterans, what upset them more than public rejection of pensions was the public discounting of the sacrifices they made in the name of patriotism. Kent focused on what he gave up to go to war: he had a young family that he left behind. And he focused on why he gave those things up: because his country needed him. It was only in the final line that he mentioned his pension. An attempt to take away the monetary value of a veteran's pension was an affront, but an attempt to take away the valor of the veteran was unacceptable.

Later in his speech, mentioned earlier, Shaw told the story of a recent interaction he had with a man who asked about the worthiness of veterans. What is interesting is that in Shaw's response, rather than claim the soldiers were heroic to a man, Shaw conceded that indeed there were men who broke during the war. As described by Shaw:

I was asked yesterday if there were not 'bummers and frauds on the pension roll,' and my answer then will be my answer now. It is true that among the sacrifices of 'The Great War' moral weakness of a sad sort, came to the lives of some of our volunteers. Army life helps or hurts the manly fiber of men, as a rule. It has always been so in all wars; it will continue to be so until the end of wars. Our war grandly developed and broadened a vast majority of the veterans of the Union. A small minority were wounded morally, and their burden of life has been a constant sacrifice ever since.<sup>208</sup>

Though Shaw claimed such men were a "small minority," his acceptance that they existed at all was a departure from what one would expect. Shaw, though, used the admission in his favor, claiming anti-veteran men did not prove that the veterans were unworthy of pensions, but instead that they deserved support more than anyone:

These moral wrecks deserve the largest sympathy; and having lost that which is the dearest gift of God to the human race—manly character—they still have a valid claim upon the bounty of the government their valor in their youth helped save. They volunteered in the morning of their lives to defend their country's sacred cause. To it they gave their all. In their after helplessness, the government they defended and preserved should cheerfully grant them pensions in their time of need.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Shaw, *The Question of Pensions*, 9.

<sup>209</sup> Shaw, *The Question of Pensions*, 9.

The broken men, according to Shaw, sacrificed their manliness through war, which was the most a man could give with the exception of his life. In saying “To it they gave their all,” Shaw touched on a sentiment that would later be ascribed to all veterans, “all gave some, some gave all.”

To at least one member of the public, Shaw’s argument was persuasive. John Van Voorhis, a lawyer and politician from New York, wrote of the speech: “I have read with interest and pleasure the great speech of General Albert D. Shaw ... in defense of pensions and pensioners. ... General Shaw in his eloquent speech has covered the entire subject, and scattered to the winds the stock fallacies that are so constantly used by those who oppose pensions.”<sup>210</sup> The argument as a whole also proved persuasive, or at least more persuasive than the arguments of the anti-veteran public. From the end of the Civil War until the last veteran passed in 1956 the veteran pension only improved. The portion of the public unhappy with the pension system was unable to dismantle it. In fact, up until 2012, a Civil War veteran’s pension was still being paid by the United States government to a couple of “dependent children of veterans.”<sup>211</sup> Though the service of Civil War soldiers was heralded during the Grand Review as “a debt we can never repay,” such sentiment did not prevent the U.S. government from trying. And neither did protestations from the member of the public that opposed pension. When it came to their pension, the old vets could add one more victorious battle to their record.

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<sup>210</sup> John Van Voorhis, “Our Debt to the Veterans,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), November 14, 1899.

<sup>211</sup> Lauren Fox, “U.S. Government Still Pays Two Civil War Pensions,” *U.S. News and World Report* (Washington, D.C.), February 9, 2012.

## VII. Conclusion

The question of inclusive veteranhood persisted for as long as veterans occupied public attention, but such attention did not last forever. Starting in 1900, the power held by the veterans started to diminish. The war was forty-five years passed, and a new war had captured the public's interest, the Spanish-American War of 1898. Along with the inclusion of new veterans, the old veterans were rapidly dying out, and with each passing year the Civil War veteran could claim fewer votes and fewer voices with which to influence the public. World War I effectively ended what little clout the Civil War veteran still possessed. In 1920, few veterans remained, under 15 percent of those who survived the war, and those that did were above the age of seventy-five.<sup>212</sup> After 1920, the Civil War veteran was nothing more than a prop, wheeled out for special occasions.

After 1900, and especially 1910, defenses of veterans and veteranhood all but subsided, largely because there were no more affronts to defend against. "True" veteranhood was largely a response to the increasingly inclusive nature of veteranhood, as well as the increased ire felt by the public when pension expenses increased. After 1900 pension costs began to drop, as did the veteran population. Over time, the veteran was not sharing his status with millions of men, but rather thousands, and questions over their value subsided. That Civil War veterans became props, though a pandering gesture, was a testament to their status. They had become the arbiters of the bygone America of the mid-nineteenth century. These factors, along with their advancing age, cooled the tempers that flared amongst veterans. No longer were there "true" veterans, or short-service men, there were just Civil War veterans, until the last.

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<sup>212</sup> Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 268.

## **Conclusion**

The Civil War, in its simplest form, occurred as follows: in 1861 men went off to fight, and in 1865 men stopped fighting. What cannot be simplified, however, is the unique and inequitable experience each man had during those four years. Some men volunteered at the first opportunity, with minimal pecuniary incentives, while others enlisted in 1864, and lined their pockets with exorbitant bounties. Some men were engaged in heavy fighting throughout the war, and others never saw combat. Regardless of the disparate nature of each man's service, his post-war title was "veteran." For a decade and a half, there was little discussion regarding who was deserving of the veteran identity, but all of that changed beginning in the 1880s. With the passage of the Arrears Act in 1879, and the popularization of the Civil War in the 1880s, veteranhood changed.

The Arrears Act was an immediately expensive pension bill that muddied the public's perception of veterans. Once considered heroes, the former soldiers of the Civil War became drains on the federal budget. With the popularization of the Civil War, the ranks of the Grand Army of the Republic swelled from the tens of the thousands in the 1870s to the hundreds of thousands in the 1880s. With the turn of a new decade, the veteran's place in the American public changed drastically. No longer was the GAR member rare and honorable; by the 1880s the veteran was common and expensive. In this new decade, the blanket term "veteran" needed to be reconsidered. For some men this title rang true, and they enjoyed an inclusive veteranhood where all former soldiers were represented. For others, veteranhood represented an identity that should be exclusive, an identity that should carry with it a great deal of status, so these veterans pushed for a distinct identity.

Some of the former soldiers, who enlisted early and served long, considered themselves "true veterans." In the 1880s these men became far less willing to allow men who did little

during the war, and were motivated by what they viewed as ignoble incentives, to be seen as their equal. In order to establish their “true” veteran identity, these former soldiers created their identity publicly, writing in to newspapers, such as *The National Tribune*, about their distaste for high bounty men, or even giving speeches criticizing the soldiers who enlisted at the tail end of the war. Other veterans went about more systematic means of distinguishing themselves from men they did not see as their equal, such as the founders of the Union Veteran Legion and the Union Veterans’ Union. Though their methods varied, their intentions were clear: they sought to regain their status.

There were many veterans, however, who did not accept this veteran hierarchy. The leadership of the Grand Army of the Republic, and the editors of *The National Tribune*, for example, fought against the “true” veteran identity, and instead preferred an inclusive and accepting view toward all veterans. Many veterans followed the leadership’s lead, and publicly defended men who were excluded from the “true” veteran narrative. Though a desire for fairness and camaraderie certainly influenced the desire for inclusive veteranhood, the leadership of the GAR and the editors of the *Tribune* also recognized that in numbers there was strength. Veterans enjoyed the economic support that pensions provided, and in order to protect the pension system veterans needed political influence. The leadership of the GAR and the editors of the *Tribune* turned towards their numbers, and used the veteran vote to elect politicians that protected veteran interests.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, however, discourse surrounding the veteran identity began to slow, and by 1917 the conversation had ended. Years proved deadlier than any Confederate bullet, and the number of veterans rapidly decreased after 1900. As the number of veterans decreased, the need for distinction followed suit. With each passing year veterans

became more and more rare, until eventually they became a spectacle. Coinciding with the decrease in Civil War veterans was the increase in non-Civil War veterans. New wars brought about new veterans, with the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War, and World War I all occurring in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Suddenly, American society was flush with “military veterans” instead of just “Civil War veterans.” With the addition of veterans from separate conflicts, parsing the difference between Civil War service was no longer as valuable. The debate over the veteran identity never really concluded, it merely faded away.

Through this debate, we can see the importance of identity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For Union veterans of the Civil War, their identity was forged on the battlefield by *all* that they did. As time passed, and the war faded deeper into the past, veteran status flattened out. Men could no longer find status from their military rank or regiment, they all shared one objective term, veteran. As the veteran identity lost its acclaim in the late 1870s due to economic and social factors, certain veterans fought to add complexity to their flat identity. Union veteranhood, an identity forged during war, was vulnerable to societal changes in the post-war world.

Veterans attached a tremendous amount of value to their service. During their time at war they sacrificed their physical wellbeing, but they also sacrificed years of their lives they could have used to set up their economic futures. When soldiers returned from the war they came back to a society where those who had stayed home had an economic advantage. Civilians during the war had the opportunity to set up their economic future in a strong economy with fewer men as competition. Veterans therefore viewed the identity and social status they earned during war as being particularly valuable, as they had essentially sacrificed the masculine notion of being a

self-made man economically for their status as martial men. The importance of that status, then, explains why veterans were so reactive when they saw their status threatened.

Moving forward, this thesis should encourage further deconstruction of identity and analysis of its accompanying status. The Union veteran identity, often approached as an “us vs. them,” shows fragmentation when studied as an “us vs. us.” That an identity as cohesive as veteranhood could fracture when confronted with a shortage of status should lead historians to question the cohesiveness of other “unified” identities. Union veterans may have stood shoulder to shoulder during battle, but in peace that unity dissipated.

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