MANHOOD, ROMANTICISM, AND THE FRENCH: THE CULTURE OF METAL EDGED WEAPONS IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the use of metal edged weapons in the American Civil War. Many historians view the Civil War as the first modern war because it was the first major conflict that saw the use of the products of the Industrial Revolution. It is this assumption of modernity that has prevented a thorough examination of why the Bowie knife, saber, sword, and bayonet were so widely used in the Civil War.

The United States was a relatively young and impressionable country in 1861. The country’s uniqueness as a democratic nation helped create a specific male identity that was rooted in principles thought to be characteristically egalitarian. Likewise society valued martial qualities, individual creativity, romanticism, and professionalism in the workplace. Militarism in particular was widespread as the threat of slave insurrection and a violent frontier characterized much of the country. At the very same time the American male identity was emerging the country’s professional army was established as were military academies.

The U.S. Army was rooted in French military tradition and philosophy. From the American Revolution to the beginning of the Civil War, Americans looked up to the French and were entertained with literature that told of Napoleon’s victories which often relied on grit and the bayonet charge. It was this obsession that combined with militarism in the American male identity that made metal edge weapons very popular when war broke out in 1861. The sword, saber, Bowie knife, and bayonet provided the tangible object men needed to project their manliness and the battlefield was the ultimate proving ground.

There are not absolutes in the answer as to why men used these weapons. Human factors in the application of new technologies maintained a niche for the saber and the bayonet. The Bowie knife and sword however were symbolic instruments that saw limited use.
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DEDICATION

The purpose of this thesis was to gain a better understanding of the men who fought in the American Civil War. It was a study and analysis of their attitudes, motives, and means to accomplish what they thought to be the best for their country and people. I would like to dedicate this thesis to the American people’s memory of those veterans in the hope that my work helps us better understand their endeavors and personal sacrifices.
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INTRODUCTION

The American Civil War was fought on hundreds of battlefields stretching from Pennsylvania to New Mexico. The war lasted four years and claimed more than 620,000 lives and tens of thousands more wounded and maimed. At the beginning of the war only about 16,000 men were in the U.S. Army but by war’s end, more than three million men had served on both sides.

Some historians consider the Civil War the first modern war because it was the first large scale conflict that saw the widespread use of technologies that were products of the recent Industrial Revolution. Although the Crimean War in Europe, 1854 – 1856, also saw the use of many innovations, it was a much more limited conflict than the American Civil War. For the first time ever massive armies were transported by rail across hundreds of miles. Telegraph communications rapidly sent orders from political centers to the front line instantaneously. This specific new capability helped manage the complex logistical problems posed by huge theaters of operation and massive armies. In the decades before the Civil War weaponry like cannon and rifles improved as well, and by mid-war every soldier in the field carried the world’s best battle rifle. Yet for much of the war the men who fought its battles ignored or disregarded the capabilities of the improved weapons. Although these same men were quick to adapt to the complexities posed by staffing and managing railroads, telegraphs, and the feeding, arming, and caring for massive armies, they were reluctant to adopt fighting methods that could maximize the new weapons’ capabilities and minimize friendly casualties. Instead many chose to rely on conservative Napoleonic tactics, élan and age old edged weapons.

The men who fought America’s Civil War cannot fit a single mold. Southern aristocratic professional military officers led armies of men made up largely of subsistence farmers raised in
rural areas. The specter of insurrections in the slave South created a long-lived militaristic culture that focused on protecting the “Southern Way of Life” and loved ones. In the more populated and industrialized North there was a higher ratio of volunteer officers in the U. S. Army’s ranks, particularly with higher ranking generals. Many soldiers who served in the Union army were recent European immigrants or native born Americans raised in industrial urban areas. Although a significant portion was from rural areas like their Confederate counterparts, they did not live under the looming threat of slave revolt and did not come from strong militarist roots. Regardless of differences in background, rank or civilian profession, American men shared a commonality that was unique in a time when monarchs still ruled over much of the globe. In the years following the American War for Independence, the American male identity emerged. By the time the Civil War began eighty years later, this identity was so engrained in the American psyche that it influenced men’s decision-making in battle. For many, how one achieved victory was just as important as victory itself.

In an era in which privacy was a luxury and reputation often preceded a man, it was essential for men to project masculine qualities to their peers and society at large. Many men learned the necessity of this at a young age. E. Anthony Rotundo’s *American Manhood* argues that during the nineteenth century, as American male identity formed, boys were taught at a very young age not to show fear or pain. These qualities were viewed as feminine and in the world of separate spheres, displaying such emotions would stymie or prevent the sacred passage to manhood.¹ Gerald Linderman supports this argument, claiming that for the first half of the Civil War men went to great lengths to display their personal pluck and courage on the battlefield. Battle was the proving ground for many and a conduit to demonstrate personal courage and manliness. Antebellum American culture supported this assumption. For example, in the first

months of the war many men refused even to seek cover in battle. Two years into the war, however, this began to change simply because the men who were determined to display their courage were either killed or wounded. In nineteenth century America, the individual, not the community, was the fundamental unit of society and men took great pride in their reputation.\footnote{Rotundo, \textit{American Manhood}, 19.} Linderman and Rotundo agree that it was individualism that often drove men to obsess over their public display of courage and chivalry. Manliness and courage were synonymous and not mutually exclusive.

The tangible object that many Civil War soldiers used to display this attitude was often not a gun, but an edged weapon. The sword, saber and Bowie knife were hand held weapons that men used to project militant qualities like courage, duty, honor and masculinity. Although there were practical uses for edged weapons, more often than not they were used for ideological purposes. These weapons were ideological in the sense that the object projected a quality or characteristic the owner wanted to display or project to those around him. To hold a sword aloft in battle or carry a Bowie knife on one’s hip filled men with the nostalgia that was popular in antebellum novels that romanticized ideas of warfare and fighting men. The saber was generally a weapon used by the cavalry. Fast moving horseman made use of the stout blade when terrain facilitated a quick strike against a surprised enemy. Nevertheless, its role was limited. But it too carried romantic ideas that personified the proud heritage of the cavalry.

The bayonet was another sharp-edged weapon that allowed men to project martial qualities. Its use was different from hand held edged weapons, however, because it remained a tactically sound weapon because it was necessary for any infantry offense. Paddy Griffith agrees that many historians have berated its use during the Civil War because it was used to attack men armed with the deadly rifle-musket. Although many officers did indeed misuse it out of
ignorance, carelessness or grandstanding, the weapon’s effectiveness was only altered by the single shot rifle-musket. John K. Mahon admitted that the bayonet remained effective in certain situations, but also asserted that “attack formations were based on the outmoded theory that bayonets would win.”³ Although the rifle-musket caused the bayonet’s employment in combat to become more complicated and trying, its value as a shock weapon remained strong. Yet there remains the question: Why were so many attacks carelessly made and what caused seemingly intelligent men to order horrendous assaults with metal edged weapons? At the first Battle of Bull Run in 1861 Confederates armed with nothing but Bowie knives charged a battle line of Union soldiers armed with guns. Inexperience would explain why charges like this occurred. James M. McPherson asserts that “Amateurism and confusion characterized the development of …the mobilization of the armies.”⁴ At Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 1863, 15,000 Confederate veterans attacked across one mile of open ground into the teeth of strongly fortified Union soldiers. Even in the last few months of the war in 1865, senior officers ordered ill fated charges with metal edged weapons. In North Carolina in January 1865, Federal sailors charged Fort Fisher which was the Confederacy’s strongest seacoast fortification at its strongest point and failed because one of the primary arms used by the attackers was the naval cutlass. The very same battle, however, just a few hundred yards away a different Union commander brilliantly and methodically attacked the same fort using bayonet rushes, and was successful in taking the stronghold. Why did some men use to their advantage the variables of the battlefield and the employment of sound tactics while others were confident in their own pluck and the edged weapon? The misuse of these weapons often derived from the desire to display individual

masculinity, military prowess, or courage, all of which were cultural ramifications of militarism, romanticism, and French influence in antebellum America.

John Lynn’s *Battle* gives insight into how cultural influences in civilian circles determined how nations waged war and built their militaries during the nineteenth century. Lynn coined the term “military romanticism”, which is rarely used in any other text. Lynn argues that military romanticism rejected the Enlightenment’s faith in the natural sciences and emphasized human psychology, chance, and that the acceptance of loss of human life was what ultimately defined the art and genius of warfare during this time. Military romanticism was also a powerful ideology which defined how men behaved in battle. Yet this phenomenon occurred at a time when science was advancing and innovative thinking was necessary to adjust strategy and tactics. This disparity in how men wanted to fight and how they should have fought, given the advanced technology of the 1860s, caused many Civil War officers to make poor decisions during battle. Both Regular and volunteer army officers were affected by the illusion that war was a romantic endeavor and that battles could be won by human will, bravery, and pluck. At the center of this illusion was the frontal assault.

The development of the American male identity occurred simultaneously as the creation of the professional military officer corps. The men who emerged from this body of military officers would serve on both sides of the war. Likewise these professionals were highly influential to the tens of thousands of volunteer and militia officers who enlisted during the war. The relationship between these two groups of men cannot be over emphasized. When the Civil War began there were only a few thousand men serving in the Regular U.S. Army. When the first calls for volunteers went out the flood of recruits, draftees, and volunteers did not stop for four years. By war’s end millions of men served in both armies. The volunteer officer, men who
were commissioned only for the war and were not career military men, served in every rank. These soldiers learned their trade from two sources: their Regular army brethren and military books.

Beginning in 1815 when Napoleon I was finally defeated at Waterloo hundreds of novels, works of fiction and official histories were written about the wars France fought between 1792 and 1815. This literature greatly influenced not only professional military men but American society as a whole. The French were known for their military expertise and Americans were eager to read books about romantic tales of French exploits. The popularity of French military prowess and the adventures of the Zouaves and Chasseurs in North Africa were very popular in the United States during the antebellum period, and remained so during the Civil War. In New York City, President Abraham Lincoln’s April 1861 call for volunteers produced the “Second Regiment Fire Zouaves”, the 800 man “Anderson Zouaves” and the “Westchester Chasseurs.”

In 1861 in Montgomery, Alabama William Russell, a British war correspondent, noticed that “Zouave mania is quite as rampant here as it is in New York, and the smallest children are thrust into baggy red breeches.”

Lynn’s claims that “Military Romanticism enshrined Napoleon’s victories… (and) mined Napoleonic experience to gain essential insights concerning the very nature of war.” Napoleon’s reputation as a military genius only grew after Waterloo with histories written by men like Baron Henri de Jomini who served under Napoleon and Fredrick the Great. Both American military men and civilians read Jomini’s books for entertainment and professional development. Jomini

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also wrote tactical manuals and other works that were popular in the United States through the 1860s. When the Baron died in 1869, his obituary in the New York Times called him “one of the most profound writers on the art of war, and his works are counted among the standard textbooks.”

American society was impressed by the romantic persona Jomini and others created for Napoleon and the French. Yet it was the French army’s victories that impressed and influenced the burgeoning U.S. Army and professional military class. During the first several decades as a sovereign republic, the United States relied heavily on France as a source of mechanical and intellectual insight, to include the arts and science of warfare. With the roots of this relationship grounded in the American Revolution, the U.S. government saw the French model as the perfect cast for its new army. The French philosophical and theoretical influence on the professional American military and the country’s military sub-culture were profound. For decades before the Civil War, while the American male identity solidified, martial qualities became synonymous with masculinity. As these cultural phenomena unfolded, American men became increasingly obsessed with the French way of war. Although Napoleon was a controversial character in the United States, he was victorious over most of Europe’s monarchs, and for years American military men studied France’s battles and theories on war which were rooted in the attack and bayonet assault.

Even after their defeat Americans remained loyal to the French and adopted Napoleonic principles of warfare which often reflected the audacious charges of the French Revolution itself. This influence cannot go unnoticed, as it greatly contributed to how Americans fought their Civil War. American cultural insecurity and inexperience in the ways of modern warfare contributed

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greatly to this reliance and as a result, many Civil War battles were reminiscent to the fighting that occurred in Europe decades earlier. All of this occurred even though Union and Confederate armies were armed with advanced weaponry that should have changed how they fought. Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson’s *Attack and Die* argues that the South’s leadership was culturally incapable of any other type of warfare other than the offensive. For an army not to take the offense not only invited an enemy attack and possible defeat, but was the most dishonorable course of action a leader could take. The authors blame the South’s Celtic heritage for their careless attacks throughout the war. This theory however ignores the fact that the blueprint for

![Figure 1: A common image in 1861 when many men carried a metal edged weapon.](image-url)

American tactics, organization, and war-fighting philosophies were written by the French and translated directly into English.

Historians have explored Civil War battles extensively and have credited the war’s high casualties with the generals’ inability to marry technology and tactics. This claim raises the question of modernity, and more specifically, what truly defined the war as modern. Any given technology measures its worth by the ability of the user to maximize the technology’s designed purpose. The rifle-musket was not used to its full potential for several reasons: the restrictive nature of the terrain of many battlefields, lack of proper training, and lessons passed on by the French army’s experience in the Crimean War and in Italy in the 1850s. These reasons taken together or individually justified the use of metal edged weapons in certain battle situations. Yet many have easily dismissed the weapons’ use with charges of carelessness or ignorance and have not differentiated between good and bad decisions made by the commanding officers who ordered their use. Furthermore, what has been written about the bayonet’s use is often inaccurate in that much of the historiography fails to attribute successful charges with intelligent decision making. James McPherson rightly claims that the frontal attack was “steeped in romantic martial traditions, glorying in the ‘charge’ and in ‘valor.’”10 Yet not all charges and attacks were in the name of honor. This attitude in part is why the roots of the matter have not been fully explored.

Other than their practical and specific uses, very little has been written about why edged weapons were produced, issued, purchased, and used in battle so extensively. The answer is tiered and complex. The desire to use these weapons was rooted in American militarism and cultural notions of how a man should behave in battle. In other instances the metal edged weapon was a practical instrument. Even so, the display of martial qualities in battle was a defining

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10 McPherson, Battle Cry, 467.
moment for soldiers, and the bayonet or hand held blade were often the only honorable tools to use.
CHAPTER I: MANHOOD AND MILITARY ROMANTISISM IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

The American military class was born at a time when the United States was maturing into an economically viable country. Fighting the War of 1812 solidified American independence from Great Britain and after a post-war recession, the United States prospered. As the country began to develop its identity as an independent nation, lingering colonial era class lines that divided many segments of society began to diminish in the face of economic prosperity and the creation of the professional in the work place. The recognition of the need for national security combined with this social phenomenon and gave way to the creation the American military professional. It was because of this that the American male identity had both civil and martial aspects which would be branded deep in the American psyche. This distinctiveness would greatly influence how Americans fought their Civil War decades later.

In 1835 Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* was published soon after his visit to the United States. Tocqueville’s book was based on his observations of American society. A French aristocrat, social scientist, and politician, Tocqueville provided insight that examined the effects of democracy on economics, individualism, politics, science, and religion. He also analyzed the chances of success for the young American republic. Aside from the functions of the government, Tocqueville recorded a unique social phenomenon. The Frenchman observed that the United States produced a unique soldier who often reflected the principles of a free society. He claimed that "soldiers remain most like civilians: upon them the habits of the nation have the firmest hold."

The characteristics that defined American society were also found in the burgeoning United States professional military.

Tocqueville visited the United States during an era of great social and economic change. During the late 1820s, Jacksonian Democrats worked toward further equality in politics and

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representation and challenged the traditional governing upper class. The idea of egalitarianism combined with the period's romantic notions of the individual’s importance in society, which created a social and cultural phenomenon that emphasized personal achievement and celebrated individual success. Fused with nation-wide increased financial opportunities and the rise of the professional in the workplace, the United States embarked on a period of national expansion and economic growth.

Early in the nineteenth century the United States Army was so small that even the most ambitious officers plying for rank could not get promoted because of limited opportunities. Many civilians did not understand why seemingly motivated men would serve in a military organization that was non-democratic, hierarchical, and impractical as a career. Such attitudes toward the military existed in part because many Americans saw the militia as its primary means of defense and did not need the army during peacetime. Congress regularly debated the necessity of a standing army, and because of distrust of traditional armies and the positive legacy of the militia, army ranks were kept thin in order to mitigate defense spending.

Between 1815 and 1846, the United States Army experienced significant changes but did not fight in a major war. Peace with European rivals made some civilians feel that those who served were a sort of vagabond class who drained the government's purse with idleness. This was hardly the case. Most U.S. Army officers were well educated and dedicated to the very slow process of professionalizing their army. During this period soldiers assimilated American notions of how a specialized and efficient military organization should operate. At the same time, throughout the country, ideas of manhood and what it meant to be a man with a respectable vocation were forming in both civil and military circles, to include the United States Army.
Toward the end of the eighteenth century many European nations began establishing formal schools of military officer training. Prior to this, noblemen and aristocrats made up the officer class and were given their rank, not according to their talent or skill, but by blood line. Two factors led to this transformation which pitted inheritance against formal training. First and foremost were the increases in technology and lethality of weapons. For hundreds of years before the inception of the formal officer training, warfare in the West had gradually moved beyond the realm of slow moving formations of sword wielding infantry and mounted jousters. Technological advancements in weaponry and the arrival of gun powder and long range field guns required enlightened thought and methodical decision making that went beyond the elementary techniques and regal norms of the Middle Ages. Second, competing countries realized that if nation states were to retain a ready and effective standing army, an officer class that maintained its proficiency during times of peace was needed. The Prussians and French led the way in this theory and established the first military academies.

The Industrial Revolution also played a role, as it allowed developed European countries to raise massive armies equipped with military technologies that were products of modern science. Not only was formal training required to employ technologically advanced weapons, but specific knowledge was needed to defend against them. For example, newly designed long range artillery required an understanding of physics and geometry. Conversely, defending against such weapons required a working knowledge of advanced mathematics to build strong fortifications. To become an officer in the new age of academic enlightenment and Newtonian science meant completing the trials posed by the military academies. Although the age of the aristocratic officer

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was passing, there remained a tradition of romance and entitlement for professional military men that would reverberate in western armies for several decades.

In the American colonies, Founding Fathers George Washington and Henry Knox noted with interest Europe's professionalization of military officers. In the 1760s, following the Seven Years War, France's future emperor Napoleon Bonaparte and Prussian Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, father of the U.S. Army drill and ceremony manual and George Washington's chief of staff during the American Revolution, were educated by their respective country's newly established military academies. Washington's time working with von Steuben and the French army during the American Revolution solidified his opinion in the value of professional officers, even though he was not trained as such. While Commander-in-Chief however, Washington did little to create what he believed was necessary: an American academy which mirrored European military training philosophies. Even though Washington ordered and Congress authorized the establishment of an academy to train officers, it was not until after the War of 1812 that the creation of a professional army amounted to much more than half-hearted efforts from Congress. Prior to 1817, the federal academy at West Point, New York rarely held formal classes, let alone drills. For years after the Revolution, the United States feared having standing armies while at the same time recognized its need for a professional full time force. Decades of experiments and attempts to establish a non-threatening institution only wasted time and money.

If the organization of a professional military college in the United States did anything, it recognized the importance of the sciences in warfare. The founding of West Point as a permanent and congressionally approved facility did not mean it was a world class academy. Although established in 1802, an oversight board recorded that "During the first fifteen years of its

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14 Ambrose, Duty, 9 and van Creveld, Training of Officers, 17.
existence, no regular system was pursued by its Instructors, and no consistent support was afforded it by the government.\textsuperscript{15} For years a floundering staff and indifferent cadets occupied West Point and did virtually nothing to contribute to the common defense. It would take the War of 1812 to convince the United States that a professional officer corps was essential to securing the country.

Well into the nineteenth century the militia was a security blanket for many American communities. Whether the threat was from invading British or raiding natives, every able bodied male was expected to serve in his local unit. The militia was very popular in the South in particular. The fear of slave insurrection generated by the late eighteenth century Haitian revolts made white Americans horrified of being hacked to death in their beds. An active militia served not only to deter plotting slaves but also as source of security to the slave owners who helped fund local units.

American men learned their trade in the militia and by studying French military manuals. Prior to the War of 1812, the U.S. military was only a part-time vocation for many soldiers and not a reliable source of income. The country's standing army was too small and Congress too prone to reduce ranks for men to rely on the service as a career. In the early the 1820s, however, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun created a cadre system that secured funds for West Point and allowed young men to become professional officers with the prospect of long term careers.\textsuperscript{16} Calhoun’s objective was to lay the foundation for a professional officer corps by organizing, training, and educating West Point cadets. The men who held senior rank during the Civil War were products of Calhoun's creation. His actions also helped create a trend that militarized American male identity.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, American society experienced changes that shed the old definitions and personal characteristics that defined a man. During this time society widely accepted that a man's profession and relation to his community fundamentally measured his character. Whether the man's trade was banking, commercial trade, or war, his ability to be good at his vocation defined essential qualities. For example, when Union General B. George McClellan was pursuing his wife’s hand in marriage in the 1840s, the young woman’s father supported the union in part because McClellan "was one of the most brilliant men of his rank." McClellan's merit as a professional convinced the father to accept the union. One day in 1839, Ulysses S. Grant stood in formation at West Point while General Winfield Scott inspected the company of assembled cadets. Years later President Grant recalled that Scott's grand appearance and rank made him the "finest specimen of manhood my eyes ever beheld, and the most to be envied."

Even after experiencing a similar review by President Martin Van Buren the following year, Grant maintained that he was impressed more by Scott than by the president. While writing his memoirs Grant wanted to honor Scott by highlighting his grand appearance.

In the antebellum era definite and defined lines separated men and boys. During these years an accepted development and distinctiveness between manly and boyish behavior were established. The model man was methodical and executed tasks with reliance, composure, and self control. Alternately, boys were impulsive and asserted aggression that was un-channeled and destructive. The goal of the passage beyond boyhood was to shed immature ways for the revered characteristics of quiet, productive, and economically successful manhood. To have work and hold down a profession allowed men to accomplish this.

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One affect of the American Revolution was that it helped shed old social and legal barriers that once restricted young men to a class-based destiny and career. The United States' vast economic markets were open to those with ambition enough to seize them. After the financial recovery of the post War of 1812 recession, the United States began a period of economic progress that continued for decades. It was during this time that Tocqueville correctly observed that America's exceptional prosperity was in part credited to its vast resources.\textsuperscript{19} Growing markets and competition among businessmen and other fruitful professions drove the burgeoning economy. It was because of this that American society welcomed competition and the prospect that a man could rise as far as his talents would carry him.\textsuperscript{20} As a consequence, the individual and the importance of personal qualities dealing with 'self' began to be more celebrated as the fundamental unit of society. Attributes that defined a well-balanced and successful man were self control, self assertiveness, and self advancement.\textsuperscript{21} Improvement of the 'self' went hand in hand with making money and creating a steadfast example of responsible manhood.

For young men who were the vanguard of the professionalizing of the U.S. Army, competition was a crucial part of earning a commission. An 1825 report submitted to Secretary of War James Barbour highlighted the importance of the competition for merit placement at West Point. The report was meant to emphasize that West Point cadets were experiencing the kind of training that created top notch professionals. It stressed that "each cadet, therefore, has a constant excitement to exertion, and is constantly in danger of losing, by the success of others,\

\textsuperscript{19}Arthur Alphonse Ekirch, Jr., \textit{The Idea of Progress in America, 1815-1860} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 23.
\textsuperscript{20}Rotundo, \textit{American Manhood}, 19.
\textsuperscript{21}Rotundo, \textit{American Manhood}, 26.
what he has himself gained.”

The report also noted that all competition was “most fair and honorable.” In addition to enumerating the course of study and the system of instruction, the board’s support for West Point and the respect for the staff were convincingly established. West Point was not only creating good officers, but good men.

Honor and truthfulness were culturally intertwined at West Point. Although regulations pertaining to honor were unwritten until the early twentieth century, its importance at the academy dates back to the founding in 1802. Before Superintendent Douglas McArthur established an official committee to investigate and prosecute honor violators, cadet vigilantes enforced their unwritten system. Honor was an important fundamental character to admirable service and a respected personal quality to democratic principles. The actions of many, both military and civilian, were often predicated upon sustaining personal honor. Honor was a chivalrous virtue during the antebellum period as were romantic notions that men were to act in a manner befitting the era's concepts of appropriateness. Without honor, all other qualities were lost in the void created by its absence.

At West Point chaplains instructed ethical training, which conveyed the importance of honor and truth. One cadet who attended the academy in the 1820s claimed "practical ethics, was thoroughly taught to our class." Chaplains were chosen to teach the importance of these virtues because Christianity and manhood were often bound and important foundations of antebellum culture. The Second Great Awakening's revival of religious zeal swept through the academy in

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23 Ibid.
24 Forman, West Point, 150.
25 Ambrose, Duty, 279.
the winter of 1826 as many young men flocked to join the church at West Point.28 The study of Christianity and ethics excited professors and students alike, and together they participated in daily prayer meetings. Cadets were even required to pass an hour-long exam on ethics every year.29 Honor was an important quality in the make-up of a man and was a fundamental trait reinforced at West Point and in American society. In the passage from boyhood to manhood, it was clear that honor must be taught to young boys because, like self control and courage, it did not come naturally.

Before his death at the Battle of Bull Run in 1861, Major Sullivan Ballou of Rhode Island, wrote a final letter to his wife Sarah. In it the volunteer Union officer anticipated his death and expressed confidence in Sarah's ability to raise their boys to "honorable manhood."30 This was the only wish he conveyed to his wife concerning the rearing of the two young boys. A more typical display of honor occurred 1865 when General Robert E. Lee, who was earlier paroled by General Ulysses S. Grant, refused to issue military orders to Confederate units still in the field because doing so would be a violation of his honor.31 Ballou was a Rhode Island politician and served as a volunteer officer only because of the war. Lee entered the military in 1825 at West Point and made a career in the army. Professionally, Lee and Ballou had little in common. Culturally however, they placed a great deal of emphasis in honor. The virtues of distinguished manhood in the United States were clearly defined, regardless of profession and socio-economic standing.

28 Church, Reminiscences, 70.
West Point was not the only institution in the United States creating American military men. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the creation of several private and state military academies. Although most academies were located in the South, the first was founded in Vermont in 1820. More notable, however, were the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) and the Citadel, founded in 1839 and 1842 respectively.

There were several demands that supported the creation of private and state-sponsored military academies. Many men who found and gathered funding to build and staff private military schools believed West Point had a dangerous monopoly on the U.S. Army's officer corps. Along with Jacksonian Democrats, military veterans who mistrusted West Point believed the cliques of aristocratic academy officers endangered the American defense philosophy of a well regulated militia. Many felt privately-trained officers would prove better at serving the republic because they would be trained differently from the Euro-centric ways of West Point.

Another selling point that kept the private military academies full and funded was the military prowess such an education produced in men. Young men educated at the academies were well disciplined, had better self control, and respected democratic principles more than their counterparts at traditional colleges. Self control and discipline were key to gaining manhood and to middle and upper class parents of rambunctious boys, a military academy was a promising option. Military schools provided the structure that instilled personal characteristics society saw as necessary for the strength of the state. Claudius Crozet, VMI's Board of Visitors president supported his institution's mission by warning that the "habits of unrestrained indulgence have frequently laid the foundation of ruin of youths." The military academy

33 Ibid, 13.
provided the discipline needed to practice self-restraint and control. In addition, the
distinctiveness acquired with a military education gave graduates an edge in private industry and
made them more competitive in seeking employment. Many Americans saw a military education
as valuable for the internal health of society as well as beneficial for the country's external
defense.34

Both West Point and private military academies both upheld the notion that romance
accompanied military service. Seventeenth century poet and philosopher John Milton wrote that
for young men, military training was meant to "inspire [young men] with a gallant and fearless
courage…heroic valor, and make them hate the cowardice of doing wrong."35 Common
assumptions were that the academies created more honorable, useful, and valuable citizens.36

Popular nineteenth century American literary romantics like Ralph Waldo Emerson
influenced how men thought about war. Emerson's works focused on the individual's unlimited
potential to be creative. Many young Americans in the 1830s and 1840s read Emerson’s essays
and were influenced by his ideas. During these decades the professionalization of the U.S. Army
occurred simultaneously with the rise of military romanticism. Historian John Lynn defined
military romanticism as "a human phenomenon ruled by psychology and will."37 Lynn argued
that during the nineteenth century, a sensitivity was developed that concluded that the results of a
battle relied heavily on the flamboyance and the creative genius of the commander. Military
romanticism introduced chance, creativity, patriotism, and the acceptance of casualties as a price
for victory and perpetuate quixotic thoughts of warfare.38 The intellectual revolution in the

34 Ibid, 11.
37 Lynn, Battle, 193.
38 Ibid.
United States during the romantic era helped define how a man was to fight and how leaders affected their bit of the battle.

American military academies were designed to erode class distinctions in order to build on the concept of individual accomplishment and its value. Wearing uniforms and gaining rank and merit based on personal performance promoted improvement of the 'self' and challenged ideas of class-based privilege cadets may have brought with them to school. In 1842 Cadet Thomas J. Jackson arrived at West Point a poor Virginian wearing a homespun jacket. Soon the object of practical jokes and ridicule for his dress, Jackson's personal character and hard work ethic won him the respect and admiration of his classmates.39 No doubt that the common academy uniform helped Jackson assimilate. At other civilian military schools uniforms separated soldiers from the rest of society and underscored "their martial and masculine qualities."40 The environment characterized by uniformity, shared hardship, and communal living eliminated class and economic presumptions among its attendees. In 1878 Albert Church, a former West Point mathematics professor, read a short biography to a crowd of officers which described his experiences at the academy from 1824 to 1831. Church claimed that barracks assignments found "the most aristocratic first class man [was] as likely to go to the poorest room in the cock loft, as the most humble plebe."41 Church's insight testified to the egalitarianism among the cadets at the academy. The term 'aristocratic' did not designate a class of cadet, but was used as an adjective to describe an upper classman. Although there were internal cliques at West Point, the results of shared hardships created a mutual respect among its graduates. It was largely assumed by many that all who passed through the trials of a military education held the

41 Church, *Reminisces*, 14.
revered characteristics that defined manhood. As a result society came to see soldiers as unique persons who understood each other better than civilian counterparts. During a meeting of cadets and National Guardsmen in 1859, the *New York Times* observed that "citizens can greet each other warmly, but it is only soldiers who know how to clasp hands."\(^{42}\) The brotherhood and commonalities military experiences produced in men during the antebellum era were revered by society and embraced by the American military establishment. Civil acceptance and esteem for the military was an important step toward American society embracing martial qualities as part of respectable masculine identity.

The nineteenth century American soldier saw courage and masculinity as synonymous.\(^{43}\) Both the North and South, groups like the New England Brahmins and the Virginia aristocracy served as examples of a common idea that manliness and knightliness were individual ideals that had to be proven.\(^{44}\) Consequently the battlefield was the ideological proving grounds for such claims to manliness.

For the Civil War soldier, no matter the rank or level of intelligence, common sense and rational thought often took a back seat to bravery and manliness. Oftentimes men were unaffected by the prospect of dying as long as honor was part of the equation. For example, Confederate cavalry General James Ewell Brown Stuart exemplified this by once expressing his desire to be killed in a charge.\(^{45}\) This may have been Stuart’s way to redeem the damage to his honor which was tarnished when he disappeared for several days during a critical period in the Gettysburg campaign. In 1865 at Yellow Tavern, outside of Richmond, Stuart died of wounds


\(^{45}\) Linderman, *Courage*, 16.
received during a cavalry charge. The cultural value placed on courage and honor meant that men behaved in a way that did not always follow the logical parameters of the science and art of warfare. These perceptions of courage were prevalent in the army throughout nineteenth century America. Yet despite progressive programs approved by the United States Congress in the 1820s and 1830s, which funded full-time professional military training, the reckless chivalry and antiquated concepts of wartime courage and honor remained on the Civil War battlefield. Ultimately, the advance in weaponry overturned the tactics and weapons soldiers wished to employ. This did not however stymie Americans’ obsession with using metal edged weapons. Furthermore, using them in fruitless charges in an attempt to prove one's manhood played a major role in how Americans fought in the Civil War.

Between the end of the War of 1812 and the beginning of the Civil War, the army went through several transformations and growing pains. In 1815 the Regular army was small, manned largely by part-time officers, and had an inefficient system of training and educating its men. By the time the Civil War broke out in 1861, the army had proved itself in the war with Mexico, operated a first rate academy to train its officers, and established itself in American society as an honorable and professional institution. Although many of its men in the rank and file were European immigrants who served out of economic need, the officers who were trained, mentored, and developed during these years were tough and intelligent men who were well-read and refined enough to have individual war-fighting philosophies. Yet what molded these men into the officers they became during the American Civil War did not come solely from the elders who trained them and the academies they attended. Antebellum era notions of romance, individualism, and masculinity molded them into the quintessential military men of their time.

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46 Ambrose, *Duty*, 12.
The celebration of the 'self' and individual genius defined many who would lead soldiers in battle during the Civil War. Conceptions of manliness and preservation of honor shaped how these men thought of themselves, their comrades, and their enemies.

The United States’ victory over Mexico in 1848 not only reaffirmed United States’ confidence in its ability to fight and produce good men, but it also the country succeeded in establishing a professional army. Problems remained, but excellent generalship, logistics, use of artillery and the performance of the rank and file impressed military men in Europe. Having fought with limited manpower and resources during the War of 1812, General Winfield Scott understood his small force could not face the larger Mexican army in open field Napoleonic style combat. One historian called the Mexican War a "well-fought war of 1812."48 Much like their endeavors against the British, Americans had to fight small portions of their enemy separate from the main force. Superb reconnaissance and audacious maneuvering of forces where the enemy least expected allowed Scott to economize his army and emerge victorious in 1848.

After the Mexican War, Regular army officers returned to policing the frontier and leading very small units. During the years leading up the Civil War, little effort went to formal mentoring and development of the Regular army officer. Even when opportunities arose to observe how large modern European armies operated in the field, American observers failed to grasp complex logistical and tactical concepts that defined large scale operations. Several American officers, George B. McClellan among them, were ordered to the Crimea in the late 1850s to witness and report on tactical and strategic operations. They returned with was information that reflected the technical aspects of equipment and its uses, not vital lessons on

tactical and strategic arts. In large part, the inability of American officers to be creative and proactive in the development of tactical theory was their habitual reliance on the French system which laid the foundation for West Point.

The Mexican War's veteran officers went on to lead large armies during the Civil War. The tactical philosophies they used during the Civil War reflected the preconceived notions that Napoleonic warfare was how large bodies of men fought. Even volunteer officers, who throughout their lives developed a fundamental and cultural respect for martial virtue, went to war with the same understanding of how war should be fought. At no other time in American history had so many men and so much equipment been assembled as during the Civil War. Consequently many Regular and volunteer officers alike had yet to conceive how practically to fight with massive armies. Many volunteer officers likewise believed that practical military skills and the art of tactics could be easily learned.

Decades prior to the firing on Fort Sumter in April 1861, American men were culturally groomed for war. The reverence given to martial virtue and the importance of being good at a profession made many men rely on ideologies that had little to do with winning on technologically advanced battlefields. In the early years of the Civil War, masculinity and military romanticism filled the void of ignorance on how to conduct military operations. Men acted on emotion and grit rather than experience and training. In essence, many who fought in the Civil War cared about how they won as much as winning itself. Victory was nothing without the romantic virtues of honorable manhood and courage. What best symbolized that notion was metal edged weapons.

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49 Ibid, 97.
50 McPherson, Battle Cry, 327.
CHAPTER II: FRENCH INFLUENCE ON THE AMERICAN MILITARY, 1817-1865

On the morning of December 15, 1864, Confederate General John Bell Hood’s Southern forces steadied themselves for an attack. The Confederates lost Atlanta, Georgia to Union forces in September, prompting Hood to march his forces through north Alabama and into Tennessee. Hood now threatened the Union supply depot at Nashville and entrenched his tattered army south of the city. Union forces were rushed from as far away as Kansas City, Missouri to stop Hood’s advance north.

At 7 a.m. the Seventh Minnesota Infantry, commanded by Colonel William R. Marshall, left the safety of their trenches to advance toward the left anchor of Hood’s line. Once Marshall’s skirmishers pinpointed the enemy, artillery was called forward to soften Confederate resistance before the main infantry attack. Once the artillery took their toll, Marshall later wrote that the infantry brigade “advanced, under a fierce artillery and musketry fire, and charged a formidable work on the right of the Hillsborough pike, carrying the work at the point of the bayonet most gallantly.”51 A few minutes after capturing the stronghold, Marshall’s men came under intense fire from a different Confederate position. Marshall ordered a second charge and succeeded in capturing scores of prisoners. By day’s end Marshall reported his artillery “fired about 1,000 rounds; the infantry expended very little ammunition except on the skirmish line, the heavy work having been done with the bayonet.”52

Marshall’s confidence in the bayonet and spirit of his men during the battle was not abnormal during the Civil War. Many commanders, North and South, used the bayonet charge as the decisive blow in battle. Marshall’s men were armed with lethal rifle-muskets but instead of firing bullets, they relied on their élan and bayonets. The colonel’s tactics were Napoleonic in

that he placed his artillery close to enemy’s line to weaken it before delivering a blow with a massed bayonet charge. Similar attacks happened elsewhere during the war. In 1863 at Missionary Ridge in Tennessee, General William T. Sherman’s men successfully used the bayonet charge to dislodge Confederate defenders. Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain’s 20th Maine saved the Union Army’s left flank with an audacious bayonet charge at the Battle of Gettysburg. Not all attacks were successful however. At that same battle Confederate General Robert E. Lee ordered a doomed charge across a mile of open field against the Union center. At Fredericksburg, Virginia in December 1862, Union forces tried fourteen times to use the bayonet assault against entrenched Confederates. All fourteen assaults failed with ghastly consequences.

Reliance on the bayonet and the pluck of men on the attack was rooted in traditional French political and military culture and their philosophy of using the offense as often as possible. From the French Revolution to World War I, French generals and theorists often defined the offense with the bayonet charge. In 1794, Jean-Baptiste Bouchotte, the French minister of War, ordered “without cease act offensively…and charge with the bayonet.”

Political leaders knew what the sans culottes lacked in training, they made up for with enthusiasm. The French were efficient with the bayonet that by the turn of the nineteenth century, most European armies adopted the French tactic of attacking in line or column with well-timed bayonet charges.

The bayonet was not the only metal weapon that served the French zeal for a spirited charge. The antiquated pike, a long wooden pole with a sharp metal tip, made a resurgence when French army ranks swelled and fusils ran low. In 1792, the French Minister of War Joseph

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Servan said of the pike that “It is time to put back into use this weapon of free people; already honored…as the arm of revolution, it is time it became the weapon of victory.”\textsuperscript{55} The political spirit generated by the use of the bayonet and pike made the use of edged weapons nostalgic for generations of French and American military men. Seventy years after Servan made his proclamation Confederate Civil War General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson requested pikes for his troops in Virginia. General Robert E. Lee approved the request. An ordinance officer, however, quietly sent muskets instead.\textsuperscript{56}

Between 1792 and 1815, France fought a series of wars against Europe’s monarchs. The significance of the French army through these tumultuous years was that many soldiers volunteered or were part of the levée en masse. Regardless of how the Frenchman became a part of the army, he was unique. French officers and men were not the automatons of monarchial armies. The “professionals” in royal legions were often prisoners who served in the ranks to avoid jail. Others were mercenaries who fought for whoever paid the most. The French on the contrary were nationalists and fought for their republic and empire. They were citizen soldiers who had a vested interest in their army winning. The spirit these patriots carried to the battlefield was unstoppable and often unmatched. Their strength and élan was harnessed by politicians who encouraged French generals to use the bayonet to win battles. The tangible object that propped up the notion that spirit and grit won battles was the weapon of free men: the bayonet. The victories the bayonet charge gave France were used by politicians to drum up support and nationalism. In fact, politicians sometimes threatened officers who did not use the bayonet in


battle with death. One general titled his official battle report “Bayonet and Republic” out of fear of being executed for not using the edged weapon.\(^57\)

The French Revolution changed how Western armies fought. At least two factors led to this transformation: the professionalization of non-aristocratic army officers, and the influx of hundreds of thousands of raw recruits as a result of the levée en masse. The recruits challenged the French army both in its ability to train and supply so many men. The French soldier was a new breed of fighting man in the Old World. The Frenchman was a citizen soldier with nationalistic ideals who held a keen sense of cause and vested interest in the nation’s success.\(^58\)

These qualities meant he would charge the gates of hell if ordered. French generals realized this and exploited the political energy created by the Revolution into a tactical advantage. Arming hundreds of thousands of motivated free men with fusils, bayonets and pikes made the French army unstoppable. The professional armies of Austria and Prussia, that could not be trusted to even carry out night operations without deserting, were unable to resist the charges mounted by massive French columns. Even after the French Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte fought his enemies using the energy harnessed by the early years of war against the monarchs. Bonaparte did this in part by rendering honors and awards to soldiers for their courage and bravery during battle.\(^59\)

Recognizing the individual with decorations was something new in Western armies and this promoted courageous acts and loyalty to the army. This devotion helped further professionalize the French army and in turn create a culture of courage within the ranks. Courage and the charge were one and the same. Although Napoleon was ultimately defeated at Waterloo in 1815, his numerous victories and success in creating a superb force made him and the French

\(^{57}\) Lynn, *Tools of War*, 170.


system legendary in the eyes of eager American military men seeking to create their own professional force.

The French and Prussians led the way in nineteenth century war-fighting theory and established the first military academies designed to train professional military men based on performance, not blood line. For the revolutionary French officers nationalism and duty, not title and war booty, became the cornerstones of selfless service. This new breed of officer was often formally educated at academies like L’Ecole Polytechnique in Paris, which was an institution that became highly influential on West Point’s antebellum course of study. Yet it would take many years following the War for Independence for Americans to recognize the need for a specialized military officer corps.

George Washington, John Adams, and even Thomas Jefferson, agreed that creating an American professional officer class was essential to national defense. First and foremost, divorcing officership from aristocratic society had to be accomplished to ensure that the ancient curses of European and Roman noble entitlements would not threaten the new American republic.60 The Founding Fathers’ objective was to assemble officers from all social classes of society, nominate potential officer candidate with civil authority, and teach the sciences of war in a manner that would benefit society, not the individual cadet’s career ambitions outside the military. In March 1802, Congress authorized President Thomas Jefferson to establish the United States Army Military Academy at West Point, New York. The express purpose of the academy was to train a corps of military engineers for army service.61 In the following 10 years the academy struggled to produce quality officers. Congressional distrust of standing armies again

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made funding sporadic and staffing by qualified instructors subservient to other national
requirements. It was not until after the War of 1812 did the government take seriously the
funding and full time employment of instructors at the academy.62

The War of 1812 revealed many national security weaknesses. The militia system and a
string of inadequate fortifications along the frontier and Atlantic Coast were the only defenses
for country. The North American Review described forts guarding the coast as "placed without
judgment, and are too small and imperfect, and that there is not in the whole country a strong
fortress or depot capable of arresting an army."63 President James Madison knew this to be true
as he witnessed the burning of the capitol by invading British troops in 1814.

On December 5, 1815 President Madison addressed Congress and enumerated the
challenges the United States faced following the war with Great Britain. He also asked Congress
to act on "the expediency of continuing on the peace establishment [of] the Staff Officers, who
have hitherto been provisionally retained."64 The president wanted a full-time army that trained
for war during times of peace. A month before Madison addressed Congress, an unnamed editor
of The North American Review published some observations pertaining to the American
philosophy on standing armies. “The greatest possible check to the powerful (is) the small
number of Regulars compared to the great numbers of militia.”65 Yet the war with Great Britain
shook political leaders into realizing that no matter how much American ideologies of the citizen
soldier propped up the militia and the minute man, a full-time professional force was needed.

European countries were still viable threats in North America. Likewise, a gap in military knowhow and strength was growing between the United States and nations that threatened her honor, frontier, and maritime commerce.

On April 24, 1815 Secretary of State James Monroe wrote a letter introducing United States Army officers Major Sylvanus Thayer and Colonel William McRee to the Marquis de Lafayette. The two American officers were preparing to travel to France to increase their knowledge in military matters. Lafayette was a hero in the United States because he helped fight the British during the American Revolution. Although almost four decades separated his ties to the United States, Monroe felt confident the Frenchman’s sympathies to America remained strong. Monroe was candid about the officers’ objectives: “They visit France to push their researches, and improve their knowledge in their profession. The fortifications and schools of France will open to them mines of great wealth in this respect.”

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He then asked Lafayette to introduce the Americans to qualified people who would provide information and tours of French schools, fortifications and fighting methods.

The executive directed assignment to France was a pivotal moment in the history of the U. S. Army. Before Thayer’s and McRee’s mission, the American army was not given the necessary tools and money to be considered a professional force. The botched military campaigns during the War of 1812 proved this. Although the United States had a military academy to train army officers, it fell far short of what was needed to provide for the common defense. The trip to Europe gave the future superintendent of West Point, Major Thayer, a clear vision of how a professional force should be trained in order to win wars. In addition to gathering French literature and treatises in the art and science of warfare, Thayer and McRee observed how

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the French academies produced professional officers from the ground up. What was subsequently created in the United States was more than a group of professional military men. The team’s vision produced a corporation of fighting men that combined American virtue and individuality with French élan and panache. For the next fifty years, French military theory and way of making war would be the most influential intellectual force guiding the creation of the professional American army. Yet despite French theoretical influences, the American army was too small to train and fight in French-like Napoleonic fashion until the immense influx of men and material during the Civil War. When this occurred, Confederate and Union officers operated under the war-fighting theories that Americans had studied and valued in the decades before the war.

The Madison administration’s program to educate American military men in the ways of European warfare was ambitious. In addition to Thayer and McRee, the president sent future Commanding General Winfield Scott, to Europe to gather as much information and literature in the arts and sciences of war.⁶⁷ Prior to this assignment, Scott was responsible for reviewing and recommending French treatises to be adopted by the American army.⁶⁸ Although he was never formally educated in the military arts, Scott admired those who were and aspired to make the U.S. Army a professional body not defined by the volunteer militias, but by a body of men whose full-time job was to make war.⁶⁹ Upon his return to the United States, Scott established regulations that molded the American army into a professional organization that in peacetime prepared for war.⁷⁰

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⁶⁸ ibid, 68.
⁶⁹ ibid, 69.
⁷⁰ Johnson, *Winfield Scott*, 70.
Besides Scott, the French system of educating young cadet officers deeply impressed Major Thayer. His wartime experiences and year-long observations of French fortifications and military schools convinced him that the United States needed to adopt European, in particular Napoleonic, philosophies on war. Together Thayer and Scott played major roles in reforming the U.S. officer corps and Regular army. While Thayer re-designed the training and daily routines of West Point cadets, Scott established systems and professional staffs that made war more fluid and standardized with procedures and regulations. Both men saw the brave but embarrassing performance of the American military during the conflict with Great Britain and knew the revisions that needed to be made. Likewise they knew that the American army had to look to Europe to forever avoid another near disaster like the War of 1812.

American officers who wanted to build a professional army saw the French model as the perfect cast and Thayer’s respect for French military philosophy was evident. In a letter to General Joseph Swift in March 1815, Thayer professed his desire for a “furlough to visit France for my professional improvement.” Although Thayer may have been selling himself for the War Department’s mission to Europe, he did not mention a desire to visit any country but France. Many recognized France’s ability to fight and even after Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo a few months later, Thayer’s reverence for the French army remained. In a letter to the War Department in 1817 Thayer called the French language “the sole repository of Military science.”

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73 Ambrose, *Duty*, 64, 65.
In the fall of 1816, Thayer and McRee spent a significant amount of time becoming acquainted with various French academies and fortifications and reported to General Swift how pleased they were with the accommodating nature of the French. The trip was fruitful and by the time the officers returned to the United States in 1817 they had collected over 1,200 French military publications, purchased more than $10,000 in books, $3,000 in maps, and about $4,500 in binding for West Point’s library. Budget constraints forced McRee and Thayer to put considerable thought into their purchases. Some materials were bought to serve as textbooks while others were to be placed in the academy’s library. The texts gathered by the officers would be the primary tools for educating cadets at West Point for the next fifty years, the very cadets who would fight the American Civil War.

In the spring of 1817, Thayer left Paris to visit several forts in Northern France. Before he left the American foreign minister to France, Albert Gallatin, asked the French government if Thayer and McRee could inspect and study the land and coastal forts in the north. The minister of war denied the appeal and allowed the Americans only to review the forts’ blueprints. Gallatin issued Thayer his passport in February. The document took the major through Metz, Calais, to England and back to La Havre where he then embarked for New York City. Thayer’s exposure to so many French fortifications served only to deepen the major’s respect for the French military philosophy.

Later that summer, Major Thayer was appointed superintendent of West Point. For President Monroe there was no other candidate for the task as Thayer was the consummate

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professional officer and had just returned from his tour of French academies and fortresses. Thayer’s first business as superintendent was to assemble a training schedule and an academic curriculum which mirrored French academies. Over the next fifteen years, Thayer’s work laid the foundation of the American professional army officer corps. During his tenure he created a culture and school of thought that modeled the French military philosophy which focused largely on the sciences. During the 1820s West Point grew in prominence and despite years of criticism from citizens and politicians who feared a professional standing army, the U.S. Army’s commanding general in 1831 called the academy “the very foundation of the whole Army.”

In 1836 Thayer received a letter from Charles Davies, a longtime instructor at West Point. Davies told Thayer that “the organization of the Military Academy under your immediate superintendence, the French methods of instruction in the exact sciences, were adopted, and nearly twenty years experience has suggested few alterations in the original plan.” Indeed when Thayer was appointed superintendent he set to work building a rigid curriculum focused on the sciences. During the first six months of Thayer’s command he worked feverishly to get 1,200 copies of Francois Gay de Verdon’s *A Treatise on the Science of War and Fortification*. Verdon was professor of fortification and the art of war at L’Ecole Polytechnique. Thayer knew the importance of this guide as did Napoleon, who ordered the manual be added to text at the Polytechnique in 1805. Thayer’s efforts to transform West Point were revolutionary. In 1833 West Point graduate and officer, George Cullum, claimed “the wand of the new Carnot waved

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over all” when Thayer arrived. Lazare Carnot was a French politician who harnessed the spirit of revolutionary Frenchmen and transformed them into the most lethal army in Europe in the 1790s. In 1824 the U.S. Congress passed the *General Survey and Rivers and Harbors Acts*. These authorizations made West Point a national institution and many of the infrastructure improvement assignments created by the legislation would be given to army engineer officers.

Silvanus Thayer’s influence on the training of officers laid the foundation for the professional military and cannot be over emphasized. However, Thayer’s contemporary and superior, General Winfield Scott, had just as much influence on how the American army operated as a fighting force and trained for combat. In the summer of 1815, Scott traveled to France arriving shortly after the Battle of Waterloo. At barely twenty-nine years old, Scott had already earned a reputation as one of the finest officers in the United States Army. Scott was a veteran warrior and beat the British at the Battle of Chippewa during the War of 1812. Long before his victories on the Niagara River, Scott recognized the necessity for good, realistic training and set out to make his command, the Left Division, an army of professionals. Using a personal copy of a French tactical manual, Scott drilled and trained his men to be proficient and disciplined at maneuvers under fire. Scott was so devoted to the idea of having a disciplined force that he ordered the execution of four deserters by firing squad. The professionalism and obedience Scott brought to the field paid off in victories for the Americans. Scott’s force was quite possibly the first unit since the American Revolution to receive formal training. After the war, leaders in Washington D.C. recognized this and wanted more of it.

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85 Motten, *Delafield*, 35.
In 1815, Scott was assigned to preside over a board instructed to review and recommend a system to train the American army. Secretary of War James Monroe suggested to Congress that the American victories against the British were not a result of any regulations adopted by the army. Congress therefore ordered a board of inquiry which was to adopt a French system. Scott agreed, calling the French method “superior to any other.”\cite{Johnson, Winfield Scott, 68} For six weeks Scott and several other officers met to discuss the adoption of a standardized manual. The result was an almost direct English translation of the French Règlement, the same manual that Napoleon used in the French Revolution, titled 1815 Regulations.\cite{Lynn, Tools of War, 160} Finally an American military manual, authorized by Congress, was published in the United States. Although a direct translation of a French work, the involvement by Congress was a milestone in the creation of the professional American military. For years there was an evident need for trained officers to lead inexperienced militia in time of war. Congressional approval of this military manual was the first action in a series of events that mitigated Americans’ fundamental fear of a standing, peace-time army.

General Scott’s influence on American military theory was profound. Scott served as a general longer than any other man in American history. Although the general was not formally educated in the military arts, he read extensively on the French Revolution and Napoleon.\cite{Weigley, The American Way of War, 72} He was an admitted Francophile and likewise translated many French military manuals into English. The challenges facing the young American army were manifold during Scott’s tenure. Congressional budget cuts and ever increasing responsibilities to police expanding American territory spread the army thin. Keeping the peace on the frontier was often more of a concern than any European threat. Napoleonic tactics and French theory deceived Americans into thinking that fighting in North America was no different than fighting in Europe. This belief

\begin{itemize}
\item \cite{Johnson, Winfield Scott, 68}
\item \cite{Lynn, Tools of War, 160}
\item \cite{Weigley, The American Way of War, 72}
\end{itemize}
hindered creative ideas and nurtured a culture of habit that lacked innovative thought. This phenomenon remained uncorrected for many decades.

The Indian Wars of the 1830s demonstrated that American military leaders did not necessarily see the distinction between fighting Indians and Europeans. As a result, Napoleonic warfare and tactics were tried throughout these small conflicts. During the Second Seminole War in 1836, Scott attempted a Napoleonic strike against Indians in the Florida swamps. The restrictive nature of the difficult terrain caused American formations to move too slowly to trap the Indians or force them to open battle. The native enemy had no communications lines, political centers, or axis of command and could not be defeated with Western tactics. 91 After seven years of fighting an enemy that employed guerrilla style tactics, the army abandoned its efforts and settled back to policing the nation’s western border. The American Indian war of the mid-nineteenth century demonstrated the limitations of using Napoleonic warfare with small forces in North America. The open plains of Europe and the huge conscript armies did not typify the terrain in the United States or her small army of volunteers. These details did not, however, change the fact that Europe remained the center of military technology and theoretical development.

During the war with Mexico, 1846 – 1848, General Scott showed that he understood his personal capabilities and how to employ his army. He did not have the number of troops as Napoleon and could not defeat the enemy with overwhelming numbers. Although he maintained the offensive tenets of security, supply, and surprise in the campaign to take Mexico City, Scott’s forces maximized maneuver, the use of key terrain, maintained communication and supply routes and avoided pitched battles, all of which were reminiscent of the tactics used by France’s ancien

régime. Scott also used France’s politically charged weapon: the bayonet. Scott’s use of the bayonet charge in conjunction with supporting artillery was a typical Napoleonic tactic used extensively throughout the French Revolution. The difference was that the United States simply did not have a large enough force to carry out the same grandiose scale of Napoleonic warfare which called for overwhelming numbers, massive bayonet attacks in column, and massed artillery to annihilate an enemy force. The strategy and tactics used by Scott during the Mexican War would be impressed on many of his junior officers like Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, George Pickett, and William T. Sherman. One historian said that what these men that fought under Scott were “fossilized” and conditioned in a way that personified their behavior during the Civil War. In short, the evolution of American military theory and the war with Mexico influenced how these men fought.

Major Thayer’s protégé was Dennis Hart Mahan, a West Pointer, student of the French school and also a contemporary of General Scott. Mahan was an instructor and chairman of the academic board at West Point for almost forty-five years. In an 1861 revised edition of his 1836 publication of *Treatise*, Mahan claimed that “the French systems are the results of a broader platform of experience, submitted to the careful analysis of a body of officers, who, for science and skill combined, stand unrivalled.” Mahan was the leading American military theorist in fortification, entrenchment, tactics and strategy during the antebellum era. He received much of his knowledge of military science from Gay de Verdon’s *A Treatise on the Science of War and Fortification*, which included the philosophies of Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini, a military theorist and historian whom Frederick the Great and Napoleon held in the highest esteem.

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92 Weigley *The American Way of War*, 72.
93 McWhiney and Jamieson, *Attack and Die*, 160.
Ironically, Mahan also served as the chairman for West Point’s “Napoleon Club.” The informal club’s members included future Civil War generals Robert E. Lee and George B. McClellan. The forum provided cadets the opportunity to write essays and present lectures on the emperor’s campaigns.95

Jomini was a Swiss-born aristocrat and personally liked by Napoleon. In 1807 Jomini planned to leave the French army for service in Russia. Napoleon convinced him to stay. Yet after being censured and arrested by a commanding officer for failing to provide reports, Jomini felt dishonored and left France to serve in the Russian army. A veteran of numerous battles during the Napoleonic Wars, Jomini later wrote historical critiques of the battles of the French Revolution. His clear and concise interpretations of Napoleonic warfare made his 1838 Précis de l'Art de la Guerre incredibly popular in the United States. At the heart of Jominian theory was the offense and the attack. As a student of Jomini, Mahan agreed with the Swiss and supported his philosophies. Even when an army was on the defense, theorists argued for regaining the offensive as soon as possible. Although not every Civil War officer studied Jomini, his theories had direct influence on many Confederate and Union officers.

Napoleon Bonaparte’s influence on Americans was undeniable. Many prominent Civil War officers like Generals Lee, McClellan, Henry Halleck and William T. Sherman became learned students of the emperor by reading Jomini. Civil War volunteer and Regular officers too read Jomini’s works to become better tactical leaders. Historians continue to debate the level of Jomini’s influence on Civil War officers but undoubtedly many of them studied his works. In fact, the English translation of the Art of War was so popular during the Civil War that in July 1862, General William T. Sherman, the leader of the “March to the Sea” campaign, included in his general orders that “Should any officer, high or low, after the opportunity and experience we

95 Weigley, The American War of War, 87.
have had, be ignorant of his tactics, regulations, or even of the principles of the Art of War (Mahan and Jomini), it would be a lasting disgrace.\textsuperscript{96} Book sales remained high during the war, as ads for Jomini’s \textit{Life of Napoleon} and \textit{Grand Military Operations} were advertised in the \textit{New York Times}.\textsuperscript{97}

Henry Wager Halleck was the first American to explain to a large readership military theory with a book. In 1846 he published \textit{Elements of Military Art and Science}.\textsuperscript{98} In the work Halleck used Jominian theory to explain how offensive strategy should be adopted as doctrine in the United States Army. Yet the book revealed the conservative nature senior American officers held before the Civil War. Like Scott, Halleck understood the limitations of American forces in that the vastness of the coasts and frontiers spread the army out too much to rely on the massive formations needed to carry out Napoleonic warfare in its purest form, which was designed to annihilate a foe with numerical superiority and bayonet assaults. Halleck dedicated one third of his book to the tenets of fortification construction and strategic defense which reflected his understanding of America’s limited resources.\textsuperscript{99} Nevertheless, Halleck’s respect and admiration for both Jomini and Napoleon was evident, as he was the first to translate two of Jomini’s works: \textit{Life of Napoleon} and \textit{Grand Military Operations}. One review of the book claimed that Halleck’s translation showed “Jomini’s remarkable knowledge of military strategy, or what the French call strategic intuition.”\textsuperscript{100} Ironically, the review was published in a wartime Confederate newspaper.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{OR}, series 1, vol17, pt II, 119.
\textsuperscript{98} Weigley, The American Way of War, 84.
\textsuperscript{99} Weigley, \textit{The American Way of War}, 85.
\textsuperscript{100} “Jomini and His Career”, \textit{The Daily Dispatch} September 19, 1864; http://dlxs.richmond.edu/d/ddr/ (accessed November 17, 2009).
The small size of the U.S. Army during the antebellum era forced senior officers to adapt their fighting methods in order to maximize meager resources. Before the Civil War, officers got combat experience fighting Indians or in the Mexican War. Conventional Napoleonic-style warfare was of little use to the army in the campaigns against Seminole, Black Hawk, and Cherokee Indians. The unorthodox hit and run tactics used by the Native Americans and the mountainous, swampy, and wooded terrain made European tactics largely untenable. In the Mexican War, General Scott defeated the enemy using maneuver, not open battle. Throughout this era, however, American military academies popularized Napoleon’s campaigns and military philosophy. The theoretical foundation laid by Sylvanus Thayer and Winfield Scott was solidified with the rise in popularity of Jomini’s books, which promoted the French school and Napoleonic warfare. While the intricacies and ambiguities of strategic and tactical theory were not understood by all, most American officers knew the basics of Napoleonic theory because of the decades of study and circulation of French military literature and legend. When the Civil War began in 1861, the flood of men and material allowed officers in both Union and Confederate armies to put into practice what they had been studying for years.

The French Revolution promoted the spirit of the bayonet and the charge. During the Napoleonic Wars, the emperor used the revolution’s energy and tactical philosophy to carry out his campaigns across Europe. The radical changes to officership and warfare spawned by the French were adopted by eager men in the United States who were creating the American army and its culture. Post-Waterloo literature spread stories of Napoleon’s campaigns outside the military and although many did not understand the intricacies of warfare, the romance of victory and battlefield glory was appealing to most American men.
CHAPTER III – BULLETS VERSES BAYONETS: THE PROBLEM OF TECHNOLOGY

In the decades between the establishment of West Point in 1802 and the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, American military leaders habitually studied classic European military philosophy, despite technological advances in firearms, communications, and transportation. Although the Indian Wars and the Mexican War provided some insight into the effects of these new technologies, Americans relied on Old World strategical and tactical theory. A major flaw in this culture of dependence was the fact that after Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Europe experienced three decades of peace. During those thirty years, technology advanced faster than military theory because there simply were no large wars.

The peace in Europe that followed Waterloo allowed both Great Britain and France to focus on expanding their empires in Africa and Asia. The small colonial wars on those continents kept up the demand for better weapons, and were virtually the only source of armed conflict to draw theoretical implications of new weapons. French involvement in the Algerian Wars in the 1830s produced a number of military treatises that would later be translated to English by American officers. Civil War soldiers studied Brigadier General Silas Casey’s *Infantry Tactics* and Lieutenant Colonel William Hardee’s *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics*, both written and translated from manuals based on the experiences of the French Chasseurs and Zouaves in North Africa. Also the two rifles most used during the American Civil War, the .58 caliber Springfield and the .577 caliber Enfield, were modeled after French rifles designed in response to the French colonial wars in Africa.101

Well into the nineteenth century, the French led the world in technological advances in military science, including small arms. The revolutionary inventions made in the 1830s and 1840s increased the range, ease of loading, and accuracy of rifle guns. In theory the increase in

precision and range would have changed how armies did battle. This did occur but only to a limited extent. At first armies that used the rifle-musket engaged their enemy from hundreds of yards away and attempted to decide the engagement with firepower. This tactic however did not last, and within a few years the up-close shock value of the bayonet was rediscovered in battles fought in North Italy just a short time before the American Civil War.

Rifle-muskets were used for years before French army Captain Claude Minié and American Harpers Ferry armorer James H. Burton invented a quick loading conical shaped bullet.102 Before Minié’s invention, loading a bullet in a rifle-musket required the operator to forcefully ram the bullet down the barrel. The process was time consuming and often caused the bullet to be hopelessly jammed in the gun. As a result many military commanders preferred the reliable and quicker firing smoothbore musket. The revolutionary bullet offered commanders the same rate of fire as traditional guns, but with increased range and accuracy. When the rifle was fired, pressure inside the hollow cavity at the base of what was called the ‘minie ball’ expanded the projectile at the instant it was forced down the twisting grooves of the barrel. The groves inside the barrel were called rifling. The rifling projected a spin on the bullet while in flight which made the bullet more accurate and lethal at greater distances. Smoothbore muskets, on the other hand, did not have rifling and the lead ball simply bounced along the barrels interior until it left the muzzle. Generally the smoothbore was accurate to about 100 yards. Minie’s new bullet enabled armies to arm their infantry with practical rifle-muskets that could deliver the same amount of firepower as a smoothbore, but theoretically at distances of up to 500 yards. This increase in range the rifle-musket provided required the revision of tactics with experiment, innovative thinking, and training.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century infantry units deployed for battle in two formations: the line and the column. In line formations men stood abreast and shoulder to shoulder. Depending on the battlefield situation, units were often two or more lines deep. This type of formation maximized the effects of musket fire by bringing every gun to bear on the enemy. Stretching a line of infantry allowed massed fire either on a single point or against an enemy line. The column formation, however, was much deeper and compact. Reticular in shape and much easier to control for officers, the column was used to deliver the engagement’s decisive blow against an enemy line. In the Civil War this formation was very popular because inexperienced officers were able to control their men more easily during the confusion of battle. The French used the column throughout their Revolution, as it was effective with inexperienced but motivated troops armed with fixed bayonets and pikes. Western armies soon saw the formation’s advantages and used the column to thrust at a weak point in the enemy’s line and create a hole to expose flanks or demoralize a foe. The soldiers in a column generally did not fire their weapons but instead used their bayonets as the fighting was meant to be close and stopping to fire would only slow down the attack. The ‘attack in column’ was the French army’s mainstay and often used in the Napoleonic Wars. The vigor of the men in an attacking column needed to be high. Large numbers of recruits made the column ideal as it required little training but was very effective against slow shooting musketeers.\textsuperscript{103} Whether executed in line or column, the theory was that without the bayonet attack, victory could not be attained.

During the Civil War, charges were ordered in both line and column formations. The theory behind a successful charge depended on an attacking force to cover the distance between the point of embarkation and the defender’s position before the assault could be stopped by musket fire. Simply put, the formula for a successful charge was that an attacker’s speed had to

\textsuperscript{103} Lynn, \textit{Tools of War}, 165.
be quicker than the enemy’s rate of fire. The increased range of the rifle-musket caused battlefields to be elongated which oftentimes forced armies to form for an attack at distances of several hundred yards. Yet many conservative military men resisted the change and did not alter their opinions or tactics. Even America’s most respected military theorist, Dennis Hart Mahan, called for units to deploy in battle line and open fire or make “a vigorous charge with the bayonet.”

Even the influential Jomini explained that “An army reduced to the strategic defensive often takes the offensive by making an attack, and an army receiving an attack may, during the process of the battle, take the offensive and obtain the advantages incident to it.” Strategically, the offense was the ingredient to success.

Figure 2: Typical infantry attack formations used during the Civil War.

104 McWhiney and Jamieson, *Attack and Die*, 42.
Correspondingly, the preferred tactic in the offense was the bayonet charge. Much like the armies of Revolutionary France, the bayonet charge was the offensive maneuver that decided the fate of many nineteenth century battles. Although technological advances in small arms and artillery questioned the effectiveness of the charge, Jomini’s influence on American theorists reinforced the theory of its reliability until well after the Civil War. In July 1865 Colonel Francis Lippitt’s *Tactical Use of the Three Arms: Infantry, Artillery and Cavalry* was published. Lippitt supported the charge and reminded his fellow officers that at Malvern Hill, Virginia, on July 1, 1862, Union soldiers dislodged Rebels with the bayonet when canister shot failed to do so.107

The divide created between technological advancements and tactical theory did not go unnoticed by American military leaders. In 1855 Secretary of War Jefferson Davis sent three officers to the Crimea to observe the war in Europe. The Crimean War was an excellent opportunity for American officers to learn how new technologies were used by the world’s best armies. Upon their return to the United States, the “Delafield Commission,” named for the commission’s head U.S. Army Major Richard Delafield, submitted several reports that suggested that the American system of training was too focused on understanding the scientific and technical aspects of warfare. The commission’s gatherings did not address the tactics applied on the Crimea Peninsular, but instead focused on the scientific function of new technology. Horse harnesses, wagons and boot leggings received more attention than did the tactical application of new rifled weaponry. Although the information gathered by the commission was helpful, the reports proved that American strategic and tactical theory was stymied because of its confidence in the French system. The rigid structure of scientific thinking which did not condone creative thought, an essential ingredient in developing tactical solutions, prevented American officers

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from maturing in a way that allowed them to address the appropriate use of new firearm technology.\textsuperscript{108} Even Mahan did not see the potential of the new rifle and claimed that “industry and skill won the day in the Crimea.” Henry Halleck also overlooked the rifles full potential and thought it useless in the hands of large infantry units and best suited for sharpshooters alone.\textsuperscript{109}

Long before Major Thayer returned from France, a precedent was set in the army to rely culturally and intellectually on the French. As a result the academy all but ignored strategic studies and instead focused its curriculum on mathematics, fortification, and engineering.\textsuperscript{110} As such the French theory that military engineering and science were synonymous was an accepted assumption.\textsuperscript{111} The culture created by this philosophy fundamentally divided the U.S. Army officer corps into three function groups: scientific, staff, and line. The scientific corps was made of engineer officers. These men graduated from West Point at the top of their class and were awarded with good assignments and jobs that resembled civil engineering projects like harbor improvements and canal building. The staff and line officers were assigned to the infantry, cavalry, and artillery. These officers manned the frontier as constables and Indian fighters. Their awards for military achievement and advanced education were minimal and many languished and regretted their decision to become officers. There were no specialized schools to train officers in the tactical arts. Despite the fact that the U.S. Army had world class engineers, the men in the engineer corps were not tactical experts. There were also no advanced schools dedicated to the combat arms. This created a tradition in the army that promoted success based on civilian-type accomplishment in engineering and ignored the war-fighting skills needed to be

\textsuperscript{108} Motten, \textit{Delafield Commission}, 198.\textsuperscript{109} McWhiney and Jamieson, \textit{Attack and Die}, 146.\textsuperscript{110} McPherson, \textit{Battle Cry}, 331.\textsuperscript{111} Motten, \textit{Delafield Commission}, 207.
good line and staff officers. Consequently West Point did not produce good tacticians who exercised creative thought, but rather officers who were rigid in their thinking process.

The effect of such scientific-based education produced a group of officers that did not fully grasp the theoretical considerations of Jomini, Mahan, and Scott. Before the Civil War these theorists stressed the offense and favored close order and bayonet tactics. Because these concepts were difficult to communicate and understand, many instructors generalized the principles and variances produced on the battlefield, a mistake that did not address the uncertainty of combat. Understandably, soldiers and officers who misunderstood the theories of warfare did not know they were ill informed and untrained. Instead, they followed their interpretation of the literature which favored daring action, the offense and the frontal attack. Eager volunteer officers too fell into this trap of false impression.

Unbeknownst at the time, Minié’s invention of a conical rifle-musket bullet created much confusion and misinterpretation. The increased range and lethality of the rifle-musket was not fully understood by European tacticians, let alone the United States military community. Even after Secretary of War Jefferson Davis authorized the adoption of rifle-muskets as the country’s issue arm in 1855, antiquated close order formations of the Napoleonic wars remained the standard method in which the American army trained. In Europe the technological advantages of the rifle-musket introduced questions of its practical application on battlefields which were characterized by environmental variables and stresses on human beings.

As with any new invention, human interaction often defines the effectiveness of the technology in use and although the rifle could in fact be incredibly deadly, conservative tacticians like Jomini failed to grasp and communicate its capability in the years leading up to the

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112 Motten, Delafield Commission, 54.
113 McWhiney and Jamieson, Attack and Die, 46.
American Civil War. Throughout the 1850s European tacticians found that manipulating and effectively using the new rifle was often more costly than relying on traditional close order tactics. Training large groups of soldiers to use the rifle-musket to its full potential took significant amounts of training, money, and time. American officers simply followed suit with this philosophy and failed to adapt their tactics to facilitate the new rifle. Volunteer officers did exactly the same thing. Even though many of them were intelligent and well-read men, when they issued orders in battle they relied on what was available to them: the advice of the Regulars and cultural notions of masculine virtue.

Americans were primed to rely on the attack and the bayonet during the Civil War. The culture of courage, chivalry and honor supported its use. Jomini supported the notion and professed the necessity of courage in an army. Officers, Jomini claimed, “should feel the resignation, bravery, and faithful attention to duty are virtues without which no glory is possible.” Antebellum American men saw courage and manhood as one in the same. Likewise, many soldiers defined themselves by their actions on the battlefield. Despite the often misunderstood theoretical application of battlefield tactics, men did what they felt society expected them to do: be brave. In light of the militarism of American society before the Civil War, the bayonet charge was an appropriate tactic that fit both American cultural expectations and popular French tactical philosophy.

One of the war’s most famous charges was ordered by a volunteer officer who had read Jomini and understood the variables of the battlefield and combat. Little Round Top outside Gettysburg, Pennsylvania was defended by Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of the Twentieth Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment. After several hours defending the hill against repeated Confederate attacks, the situation grew desperate for the Twentieth Maine and

114 Jomini, *Art of War*, 57.
Chamberlain realized a critical point in the battle had developed. With his left flank in danger of disintegration and his men’s dander up, he ordered a bayonet charge. Chamberlain’s sense of timing the decisive moment in the battle made the charge a success. His attack has since become a popular and idealized moment in American Civil War history.

The preceding year while in camp on the Potomac River, Chamberlain wrote his wife and asked for his copy of Jomini’s *Art of War* so his Regular Army colonel could instruct him. Chamberlain was a volunteer officer who at the beginning of the war was a professor of rhetoric at Bowdoin College in Maine. Like Chamberlain, tens of thousands of volunteers learned soldiering from books and lectures from Regular army officers. At the core of their lessons was the French way of war and the attack. This does not mean that everyone who read Jomini or Mahan understood the theoretical fundamentals of warfare. On the contrary, many did not. Volunteers like Chamberlain who were not professionals led in a manner deemed honorable by society and the charge fit this ideal. Fortunately for Chamberlain, his gamble at Little Round Top succeeded.

Perhaps no American, North or South, demonstrated the French influence of using the bayonet charge and élan better than Union General Phil Kearny. Unlike Chamberlain, Kearny was a lifelong professional soldier who lost his arm in the Mexican War. Kearny also fought with the French in Northern Italy and Algiers. For his bravery and service to France he was awarded the Cross of Legion and Honor by Napoleon III. During the Peninsular Campaign in June 1862 near Richmond, Virginia, the Third Corps received General Order No. 15 from Kearny. “Colonels and field grade officers! When it comes to the bayonet, lead the

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charge...stimulate the laggard, brand the coward, direct the brave.” Kearny was killed in 1862 when he accidentally rode into Confederate lines just a few days after he ordered a failed bayonet charge at the battle of Second Manassas.

West Point’s reliance on the French school, which saw science and the military arts as synonymous, obstructed American officers’ ingenuity and intellectual progress. It also stymied strategic and tactical thinking in its officers. As a result, line officers who policed the frontier and fought Indians were not groomed and schooled appropriately. Attention and money was focused on the sciences of engineering and fortification construction, not fighting. One result was that American officers studied and trained with translated French tactical manuals and treatise suited for the plains of Europe, not North America. Another result was that few officers understood the theoretical implications and intricacies of the manuals they trained with. Officers knew how to maneuver their men, but many did not how to incorporate the variables of terrain, timing, and complex tactics.

The peace that followed the battle of Waterloo did not stop the demand for improved weapons and by mid-century, Europe and the United States re-armed their forces with rifle-muskets. Theorists presumed the greater range offered by the new rifles would elongate the battlefield and change the criteria for victory. The French proved this wrong with victorious bayonet charges against the Austrians in 1859.

CHAPTER IV: RETRACING THE LINEAGE OF THE BAYONET

American Civil War historians often view the bayonet as an archaic weapon that was used more as a campground utensil than as a weapon. Popularly viewed as the first modern war, the Civil War is often studied from the perspective of advanced and new technologies in the hands of officers and men untrained and inexperienced in the art of effectively using them. It is because of this attitude that historians often blame the use of the bayonet and the bayonet charge for the high casualty rates on such technologically advanced battlefields. Yet if put in a perspective of what the psychological effects of a properly coordinated and led bayonet charge achieved against an enemy, along with the limitations of 1860’s technologies, historical merit is found in the appropriateness of the bayonet charge. Throughout the Civil War the bayonet remained an effective weapon despite advances in the technology of other weapons.

The bayonet made its way onto the world’s battlefields in the seventeenth century. Before this time musketeers and pikemen (men armed with long metal-tipped spears) made up two different classifications of infantry soldier who had separate jobs on the battlefield. The French were credited with the novel idea of combining the musket and pike would serve well as a combat multiplier, in that one man could do the job of two. The idea lay in the prospect that once the musketeer fired his one shot, he inserted the bayonet into the barrel of the musket, and effectively transforming himself into a pikeman. The first bayonets were poorly designed and required substantial effort and time to affix. This flaw had consequence because once a unit fired its volley it was vulnerable to charging cavalry or infantry until bayonets were affixed and the

men were poised as a unit to receive the enemy. The bayonet’s potential demanded developments that made the weapon more formidable and practical.

By the early eighteenth century, a more effective and sturdy bayonet appeared as standard issue to armies in Europe. The socket bayonet, as it became known, allowed for the bayonet to be affixed and off-center from the muzzle. This permitted the gun to be fired and reloaded without ever removing the bayonet. The advent of the socket bayonet made the pikeman obsolete. The soldier could now use his musket and transition to the bayonet as his primary weapon with minimal effort, having attached it before the fight began. In practical terms the invention and inception of the socket bayonet meant that if an attacking force, be it infantry or cavalry, charged a line of infantry with their bayonets fixed, the attackers would have to face a volley of musket fire and without so much as an instant passing, a line a bristling steel. The meshing of the two weapons fundamentally changed the face of tactics in organized warfare. Commanders and tacticians no longer had to employ two distinct bodies of men to counter a threat or mount an attack using the pike and musket. Thereafter the infantryman was an indispensable asset on the battlefield.

For centuries strategic and tactical designs revolved around the infantry serving as the main force in acquiring and securing a geographic objective. Even on today’s battlefields, despite smart technologies and advanced aerial and ground weapon systems, real estate cannot be captured and secured without a dismounted force of soldiers. The “boots on the ground” philosophy is so sturdy that it has survived generations of increased technologies and maintained its necessity despite the multiple land, sea and air dimensions of the modern battlefield. Although

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120 Jones, *Art of War*, 267.
121 Jones, *Art of War*, 268.
122 Jones, *Art of War*, 269.
the philosophy has remained the same, infantry tactics have always played catch-up to accommodate advanced technologies.

Throughout the nineteenth century, infantry units armed with muskets and bayonets used large numbers of men in battle formations with two main objectives. First and most notable was to simultaneously fire their muskets at the enemy at close range. The volleys were intended to kill, wound, or scare the enemy from his position. The standard European tactic was methodical and wrought with formal commands that demanded exacting discipline from the soldiers. The rank and file was expected to stand shoulder to shoulder and unflinchingly take whatever the enemy shot or threw at them until it was their turn to return fire. At an unspecified time in the fight, a commander waited and worked for an offensive advantage called the decisive moment. At this point he could carry on the attack with firepower and try to break the enemy’s morale, or he could order a bayonet charge to move the enemy off the field.123 For generations the latter was the most effective and economical choice. The bayonet was also effective against cavalry in that charging horses would either be impaled or stop abruptly before the line of bayonets and throw their riders. In South Asia in the seventeenth century, European bayonets killed enemy cavalry by the thousands and helped conquer much of the continent.124

In the first half of the nineteenth century, specifically during the Napoleonic Wars, many battles were decided by the bayonet charge. At Austerlitz in 1805, the French charged with bayonets in the early morning fog and won that place for Napoleon.125 At one point the French troops charged uphill with “fit and decided step” which decimated the confidence of even the

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123 During the Civil War a commander often had the option to use his artillery or cavalry to influence the decisive moment of a battle. For the sake of this thesis however, the infantry will be the only battlefield system addressed.
most experienced enemy soldiers. At Leipzig in 1813, the French beat the Prussians in two desperate bayonet charges. When bullets and grape shot failed to rout the Prussian, the French bayonet succeeded. Yet despite the bayonet’s effectiveness, invention and innovation in firearm technology challenged its role in battle.

Because of the rifle-musket’s increase in range and ease in loading, European tacticians believed that the decisive point in a battle no longer occurred at close range, but at a distance of several hundred yards. In theory, when two forces opposed each other on the battlefield they could decide the outcome by inflicting casualties from hundreds of yards away. When a commander realized he was suffering too many casualties in the fight, he would retire from the field in defeat and leave the ground for the opposing commander who inflicted the damage. Yet the theory did not always play out as expected.

After the Crimean War, the French army began to train their infantrymen on marksmanship techniques at ranges of only 400 yards. Before the war the French trained their soldiers to shoot their rifle-muskets at much greater ranges. The realities of the battlefield and the experiences gained on the Crimean Peninsula made French tacticians think in more practical than technical terms. Several factors played a role in this change in philosophy. First, the French rifle, the Minié Pattern 1850, had sights ranging to 900 yards. This meant that the marksman should have been able to accurately estimate range up to 900 yards. Also, shooting a man-size target or even a formation of men at such great ranges required a steady position and significant training in marksmanship which were skills not easily mastered and took time and resources to teach. Marksmanship training was costly, time consuming and ate resources not always available or

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126 Lippitt, *Tactical*, 27.  
129 Ibid.  
130 Ibid.
prudent to the objectives of the army. Additionally, firing from long distances exhausted men’s
energy, emboldened the enemy, fouled weapons and destroyed the soldier’s confidence in his
weapon.\textsuperscript{131} Despite these challenges, commanders during the Crimean War tried to maximize
weapon technology by engaging at long ranges.\textsuperscript{132} By doing so they attempted to force the
decisive moment in battle. Because of this technique and the problems associated with it,
specifically the logistical strain which came from expenditure of large amounts of ammunition,
long range engagements were eventually abandoned by the French.\textsuperscript{133} In 1859 when France went
to war against the Austrians in present-day Italy, a renewed emphasis was put on the bayonet in
the offense.\textsuperscript{134} The French army’s ultimate success against the Austrians was due in part to of
their post-Crimean War philosophy and change in tactics. In their attacks, the French pressed the
Austrians with “unstoppable élan” and were so successful with bayonet charges that their enemy
adopted similar shock tactics.\textsuperscript{135} The Austrians learned their lesson and in 1863 one of their
generals professed, “The bullet is a fool, the bayonet a smart fellow.”\textsuperscript{136} The failure of the long
range engagement during the Crimean War can be attributed to many factors: poor
marksmanship training, the inability of supply lines to keep ammunition at the front and
conservative thought that was dedicated to Napoleonic shock tactics.\textsuperscript{137}

This shift away from the brief trend of the long range engagement philosophy served only
to reinforce the emphasis on the bayonet charge as a major offensive component in the United
States. The lessons of the Crimean War and the stifling effects of relying on long range
marksmanship were evident as most large Civil War rifle engagements occurred between 100

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\textsuperscript{131} Lippitt, Tactical, 28.
\textsuperscript{132} Nosworthy, Bloody Crucible, 58.
\textsuperscript{133} Nosworthy, Bloody Crucible, 59, 90.
\textsuperscript{134} Nosworthy, Bloody Crucible, 60.
\textsuperscript{135} Richard Holmes, Battlefield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 104.
\textsuperscript{137} Nosworthy, Bloody Crucible, 58.
\end{flushleft}
and 136 yards. This does not mean that the rifle-musket was not used to its full potential. Skirmishers and snipers, small units of men or individuals in front of or on the flanks of main bodies of large infantry units, picked off enemy soldiers from afar. These groups of men often used the full potential of the rifle-musket in battle. Their responsibility in combat was to force enemy units to deploy or attack prematurely, provide early warning for friendly units or keep an enemy force at bay. Yet regardless of their effectiveness, battles were decided by the infantry attack and the bayonet assault, not the marksmanship skills of skirmishers.

Many historians argue that the increased range of the .577 caliber Enfield and .58 caliber Springfield rifle-muskets, the two predominant battle rifles of the war, negated the use of the bayonet. Their logic in the argument was that as an attacking force closed on an enemy's position, the attacker would have been in the range of the defender’s guns for a longer period of time and thus received more fire. Several variables weaken this theory. First, terrain dictated how two forces fought. For example, when Confederate General George Pickett made his doomed charge across the field at Gettysburg, it failed in large part because the Federals saw him coming from one mile away and was able to place devastating fire on him the entire length of the field. Additionally the time spent the Confederates spent marching over exposed ground took away the element of surprise, a key tenet in the assault. Alternately, the Union army at Town Creek near Wilmington, North Carolina made a successful charge because of the “wooded nature of the field.” The woods allowed the attackers to use stealth to get close enough to charge from the cover of the trees. At Town Creek and hundreds of other battlefields of the war, the 500 yard range of the rifle-musket was not a variable. A Model 1836 smoothbore, the American issue

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139 *OR* ser. 1, vol. 47, 964.
musket during Mexican War, with an effective range of only 100 yards, would have been just as effective in many cases.

Another variable that weakens the increased rifle range theory is that the average Civil War soldier could fire only about three aimed shots per minute. Each shot the soldier fired took seventeen distinct drill movements to load, prime, aim, and fire.\textsuperscript{140} By comparison, the dated 1836 smoothbore took eighteen movements. The rate of fire, the number of bullets fired in any given time amount of time, improved only slightly with the more accurate rifle-musket. In short, if an attacker was charging a defender, he did not take any more fire from defenders armed with rifle-muskets than from defenders with smoothbores. Historian Patty Griffith supports this theory and claims that it was not until years later during the Franco-Prussian War, when quicker firing breech loader were used did the dynamics of the battlefield truly change. Granted, the Civil War rifle’s accuracy was improved and more bullets presumably met their mark, but if an experienced commander knew not to attack over large open areas, he took away the technological advantages of rifle-muskets from the defender. For example, in June 1864, when Union General William T. Sherman attacked the Confederate lines at Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia, the terrain was so wooded and rocky that the Confederates could have been armed with smoothbores to beat Sherman back. The wooded terrain did not allow the rifle-musket’s increased range to be used to an advantage. The rifle-musket was a technological benefit only if the terrain allowed it to be exploited. Consequently, some commanders knew how to analyze the battlefield and successfully employ their unit. Others did not, but instead used notions of bravado that were seen as synonymous with the bayonet charge.

Captain George B. McClellan translated a French bayonet exercise manual for publication in the United States in 1852. Lieutenant General Winfield Scott’s recommendation

\textsuperscript{140} Griffith, \textit{Battle Tactics}, 85.
that the bayonet exercises be printed as an official manual spoke volumes for the tactical analysis that went into pursuing and refining the philosophy of the bayonet as a serious weapon and the bayonet charge as a meaningful tactic. The manual was not just for West Point cadets as McClellan makes reference that he chose this specific French guidebook because it could “readily be taught by the non-commissioned officers.” McClellan, who often receives accolades from historians for his superior job training the Army of the Potomac in 1861-62, prefaced the bayonet manual with a personal narrative. In it he stated that the drills were good for gymnastic exercise, amusement, and gives soldiers confidence in themselves and their weapons. Even today bayonet exercises fulfill the same desire many commanders want for their warriors: honing and channeling aggressive behavior, physical exercise, and the one-on-one pugil stick matches all conform to the preface McClellan wrote in 1852. McClellan also addressed the more practical meaning of the bayonet training he supported by listing the pay-offs of what a well trained soldier brings to the fight: “in the shock of a charge, or when awaiting the attack of cavalry, the men will surely be more steady and composed, from the consciousness of the fact that they can make good use of their bayonets, and easily protect their persons against everything but balls.”

The shock effect was not a new idea to the Civil War soldier as it worked well in the Mexican War. Whether it was a yell, a musket volley, or a bayonet charge, the U.S Army took the lessons of the Mexican War and its success in the charge and applied them to their warfighting philosophy. In 1850 West Point recorded its first lessons in edged weapon sparring

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142 ibid.
in its syllabus. “Fencing”, as it was called, was conducted with both bayonets and swords. Reports from French operations in the Crimea undoubtedly had effects on the development of the American professional officer. In 1858 the course “bayonet exercises” appeared on the academic syllabus for first year cadets. The academy continued teaching bayonet skills throughout the Civil War years. This gives credence to the culture that developed around the weapon and the confidence men had in it as significant battlefield weapon. Although an officer or cadet was never expected to stand shoulder to shoulder in the ranks and conduct a bayonet charge, their supervision of training was a necessity in an army that relied on the bayonet’s offensive advantages in an attack and defensive advantages when repelling cavalry.

The charge, by design, was meant to drive a foe from the field, not provoke a large-scale bayonet duel between units. Its execution took skill, precision, and a keen eye and ear for happenings around the field. All hinged on one man: the commander. If he delivered commands at the appropriate time the charge would be victorious. If not, he could be defeated. Both results happened often during the Civil War. Yet historians often focus on the failures of bayonet charges, not the successes. When successful bayonet charges are mentioned, the victory has often been sensationalized by describing the commander as a tactical genius. In the case of its failure, historians decried its attempt with accusations of incompetence or that the commander used his men as cannon fodder. The fact was that bayonets and their use maintained a valuable and practical application on Civil War battlefields. Dismissing the bayonet's use as bravado or stupidity does not thoroughly and empirically examine why the weapon remained so widely used during the Civil War.

145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
The bayonet’s effectiveness was rooted in the idea that human beings are fearful of physical injury. Despite years of discipline and combat training, sane fighting men enter battle with the fear of being maimed or killed. Human behaviorists support this theory. For example, Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory includes safety as a need. According to Maslow’s theory, "safety is an active and dominant mobilize ... in real emergencies, e.g., war."\(^{147}\) Despite the discipline a soldier receives from good training, which is by design to teach one to ignore misgivings and reservations of injury and death and execute a task, fear is always a factor when dealing with rational human beings in warfare. Putting this rationale in the context of the battlefield, Maslow’s theory can easily be applied to the bayonet charge. A bullet, cannonball or piece of shrapnel travels faster than the eye can see. When a man is struck by a projectile, it was not seen coming and was often a surprise to the victim. A bayonet however is different. A bayonet is attached

to a rifle which is being carried by a man who was charging and most likely filled with anger, confidence and energy. Former West Point psychology professor and soldier Dave Grossman claimed that the bayonet was in fact more repugnant and horrific to human beings because one could see it coming.\textsuperscript{149} In comparing the other faster moving objects on a battlefield that cause injury and death, a bayonet closing in on its mark gives a combatant ample time to make the determination to stay and fight or seek safety with others who have possibly started abandoning their position on the field. An Austrian officer recalled the fighting in North Italy with:

"Gymnastics are all! In the last war we did not see any bayonet wounds! Most bayonet attacks do

\textsuperscript{148} Wilson Homer’s “The War For The Union – The Bayonet Charge.”
http://www.sonofthesouth.net/Winslow_Homer_bayonet_Charge.htm (accessed November 5, 2010).
not result in a collision, rather the faster, nimbler, more resolute force simply chases the less resolute force away.”

Many Civil War commanders understood the ambiguities of battle and were well trained. These men saw to the responsibilities of the safety, well being, and training of their men. The tactically savvy officer understood the common sense approach to maneuvering and employing his unit in order to maximize its effectiveness with minimal cost in life, material and morale. Some officers, however, were not up to the demands of the position and unfortunately, the consequence of incompetence did not always fall on their shoulders. Many times it was the men under their charge who suffered from poor decision making and ignorance in tactics. Other commanders could have sound experience and ample practical knowledge in the art of fighting, but have an idealistic way of looking at victory in that it did not matter if he won, but how he won. In the age of Victorian chivalry and honor, the bayonet charge fit the romantic venue so embedded in nineteenth-century militarism pervasive in the United States professional and volunteer officer corps. Leaders had different levels of experience and did not fit the same mold. Many commanders had the ability to be pragmatic when ordering assaults. Alternately there remained many volunteer officers who sought to mimic their professional brethren Regulars and had not developed the sense of timing and a feeling of the terrain when they gave the order to charge. They studied Hardee’s Manual of Arms, and McClellan’s Bayonet Exercise Manual without having the professional development and maturity which often goes with mastering the application and the art of military tactics. It was often because of this inexperience that many officers often inappropriately used the bayonet charge.

If the bayonet charge is viewed in the context that many successful attacks were methodically executed by experienced and thinking officers, sound evidence is found in its usefulness. At the Battle at Balls Bluff, Virginia in October, 1861, Confederate General N.G. Evans ordered a bayonet charge that drove Union soldiers into panic. Evans reported that “many were killed by this formidable weapon.”¹⁵² Evans continued his report describing the turmoil caused by his men’s spirited attack. Union men drowned in the Potomac River and overloaded boats sunk as panic-stricken soldiers capsized them trying to escape. The river served as an anvil and the attacking Confederates served as the hammer. Anything caught in between was crushed or drowned.

Not all attacks went so smoothly. A unit attacking on the open plain with the intent of getting close enough to force a decisive bayonet charge often met horrific consequences. When units attempted to move into the open and maximize their fire power and simply shoot it out until one side left the field, nothing decisive occurred.¹⁵³ Both sides often depleted resources without any gain, the very lesson the French learned during the Crimean War. Doctrinally, the offense was successful if the attacker was maneuvering, gaining ground, and damaging the enemy’s will to fight; none of which were easily done.

Both sides of the war were guilty of failing to meet basic offensive tenets before ordering a bayonet attack. At Fredericksburg, Virginia in December 1863, Major General Ambrose Burnside ordered fourteen attacks, all of which failed miserably. Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg, ordered by General Robert E. Lee, was also intended to force a decisive bayonet charge. Both Burnside’s and Lee’s forces marched in battle formation toward an entrenched foe that knew they were coming. Even if the attackers had met their objective in any substantial number, the

¹⁵³ Griffith, Tactical, 140.
spirit needed for an aggressive charge would have been bled out by the murderous fire they received moving over the open field. Arguably, the open terrain doomed those assaults before the orders were even issued.

Despite the mistakes made by some commanders, the philosophy and effects of the bayonet charge were not always confused with delusions of grandeur by the men who ordered them. Historians attribute the high casualty rates of the war to leaders who were too quick to order a charge or carelessly maneuver their units into dangerous positions on the battle field. This was certainly true in many cases. Yet one must remember that these assessments are made by twenty-first century interpretations in which an understanding, concept, and respect for technology exists. Civil War commanders’ reasons for ordering bayonet assaults are easily questioned as long as it is done by analyzing the black and white areas of events and leaving the ambiguities of tactical philosophy, individual experience, psychology, and culture alone. The bayonet charge was a shock tactic that when employed appropriately, was effective at beating an enemy without ever killing him. The edge weapon did not have to enter the defender's body and he did not have to die or be wounded, he just needed to have the fear of being run through to be scared off the ground the attacker wanted. Fear of the bayonet was universal and timeless. A British World War I veteran of the Western Front claimed that of everything he experienced that could have taken his life, the enemy’s bayonet leveled at his gut impressed him the most. He proclaimed that “when I had a bayonet a few inches from my belly I was more frightened than by any shell.”

The most convincing evidence that the bayonet was an effective fighting weapon during the Civil War is found in the U.S. Army’s tactical philosophy which was spelled out in post-war

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manuals. Specifically, Colonel Francis Lippitt’s *Tactical Use of the Three Arms: Infantry, Artillery and Cavalry*, published in July 1865.\textsuperscript{156} Lippitt was emphatic that “The decisive effect of infantry is produced by a rush on the enemy with the bayonet.”\textsuperscript{157} Throughout his manual Lippitt referenced engagements during the war that highlighted the bayonet’s use as a decisive weapon. One noted charge broke hours of insignificant rifle fire at Mill Springs, Kentucky in 1862. Opposing sides lay dormant on the field before a bayonet charge drove the Confederates from the ground in terror and confusion.\textsuperscript{158} Lippitt’s manual instructed commanders on the decision making process and how to execute bayonet maneuvers successfully. He also explained the offensive fundamentals and how to consider terrain, morale, and logistics before committing to a charge.\textsuperscript{159}

The dynamics of the battlefield did not escape Lippitt, as it is clear from his writings that the charge can be disastrous if done in haste. Circumstances often called for artillery preparation and even refraining from shooting during the charge as key factors to success. The commander had to execute his charge with variables such as terrain, supporting infantry and artillery, as well as the fatigue and spirit of his troops and that of the enemy. It was very clear that the bayonet charge was the art of warfare, whereas the rifle-musket was the science of warfare.

\textsuperscript{156} Lippitt, *Tactical*, Cover page.
\textsuperscript{157} Lippitt, *Tactical*, 8.
\textsuperscript{158} Lippit, *Tactical*, 25.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
Historians have used *The Medical and Surgical History of the Civil War* to discount the effectiveness of the bayonet during the Civil War, as there were far fewer bayonet wounds than gunshot wounds.\(^{161}\) Examination of this source of raw data can be misleading. Without a doubt this compilation of reports proves that there was a significant difference between bullet and bayonet wounds. The fact that there were comparatively few wounds and deaths from the bayonet support the argument that defender and attacker rarely met in significant numbers during a bayonet charge. Indeed at some point in a charge the psychological momentum spurred by the assault tipped to one side or the other.\(^{162}\) The attacker scared the defender off or the defender held his ground and broke the will of the attacker. The practical evidence is correct; relatively few bayonet wounds were inflicted compared to bullets and shrapnel. However, if even a brief

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\(^{160}\) Figure 4: The U.S. Army’s successful attack on Confederate Fort Fisher, N.C. was done with the bayonet charge in 1865.

\(^{160}\) Fletcher Pratt, *Civil War in Pictures* (Garden City Books, Garden City, NY, 1955), 250.


comparison is done between the *Medical and Surgical History* and the compilation of actions and engagements found in the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, one will find that fear of the bayonet was why so many charges happened with so few wounds. When faced with the bayonet, defenders often ran. Likewise, when given the opportunity to bayonet someone, the attacker usually chose a different method to hurt his enemy. At Chattanooga, Tennessee, a Union Army surgeon, D.G. Brinton, walked Missionary Ridge after a successful Union charge to look specifically for bayonet wounds. He wrote: “In such actions as this, if anywhere, we would look for bayonet wounds. Here was a charge – a hand-to-hand contest literally; some of the contusions where given by clubbed muskets. Not a bayonet wound is recorded. I looked for them, but neither saw nor heard of any. There was none.” Military historian Richard Holmes accurately notes that “one side or the other usually recalls an urgent appointment elsewhere before bayonets cross”. In 1862 at the battle of Malvern Hill, Virginia a Prussian officer noted after witnessing several Confederate bayonet attacks that “bayonet fights rarely if ever occur and exist only in the imagination.” What the Prussian meant was that men rarely sparred with bayonets even though bayonet attacks occurred.

Hundreds of successful bayonet charges occurred during the war. Many succeeded because the commander had situational awareness of the field. His staff, subordinate commanders, and runners delivered timely information that made his decision making process thorough. He calculated the strengths and weaknesses of his men and their training. He knew the terrain and how it affected not only his ability to kill the enemy, but the enemy’s ability to hurt him. When he saw his chance he gave the order to charge and drove his foe from the field. He

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165 Wawro, “Army of Pigs”, 416.
knew he would not contend with a large bayonet duel per George B. McClellan’s manual. He also knew the value of fear, violence of action, timing and shock.

There were also hundreds of failed bayonet assaults. At Gettysburg Pickett’s Division had to march one mile across open ground before it would reach the objective, all the while the enemy knew they were coming. Surprise was lost as was shock affect. Some historians have argued that Lee ordered this attack because of the culture of honor and military romanticism. Other more practical variables led to failed charges: poor timing, ignorance of an enemy’s strength or allowing the enemy’s cannon, pickets or sharpshooters to have a clear field of fire on units as they prepared for an attack.

Hundreds of variables came into play when the Union and Confederate armies met on a field to do battle. Because many of these variables were lost in simplicity and neglect, history has not been fair to Civil War commanders who used all available weapon systems in a fight. Quite possibly these interpretations have been developed because many Civil War soldiers had a penchant for metal edged weapons. Bowie knives, swords, and sabers, although carried, were rarely used with any effect in battle. The bayonet has unjustly been categorized with these rather impractical tools because some officers misused the bayonet attack. Nevertheless, the bayonet was part of a combined weapon system that was necessary. Even though there remained a romantic aura around the weapon, the slow rate of fire of the musket and fear of being stabbed by a charging foe armed with a rifle with fixed-bayonet made the weapon an essential piece of equipment.

The complex nature of the bayonet as part of a combined weapon system made it exclusive because it remained practical during the Civil War. Other hand held edged weapons, however, were impractical or saw very limited use. The Bowie knife, sword, and saber, although
lethal and useful in a very narrow sense, were manufactured, purchased, and used in battle throughout the war.
CHAPTER V: THE MARK OF A MAN: SWORDS, SABERS, AND BOWIE KNIVES

When calls for volunteers rang out in the spring of 1861, American men were primed for the coming fight. Political bantering in the North and South filled the imaginations of the naïve who thought the coming conflict would not only be short, but glorious and easy. Different types of edged weapons fueled fantasies of one-on-one combat and conjured images of the chivalrous knights as portrayed in the popular novels of Sir Walter Scott. American legends and myths of battles past nurtured the American obsession with honorable combat and hand-held edged weapons provided the tangible object that directly correlated honor and individual action. Cutting an enemy with sharpened steel was a display of bravado to the Confederate soldier more so than the Federal soldier, although there were exceptions. Within the spectrum of the devastating results of gun powder and industry, there remained a niche for the hand held edged weapon. The sword, saber and Bowie knife all served during the Civil War in practical

Figure 5: Union Private Emory Eugene and his Bowie knife and French Zouave hat. Note his Napoleon-like pose.

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and ideological roles. Whether with the individual or the cavalry squadron, these weapons had remarkable impacts on the Civil War soldiers’ psyche before and during the war.

The legend of the Bowie knife was born at the Alamo in Texas and was for the most part, a Southern fascination. Confederate soldiers in particular loved the Bowie knife. At the outset of the war, men in Confederate army training camps sported Bowie knives, serrated edged blades and fighting knives that bolstered their display of manhood. So strong was the desire for blades that in Alabama, carriage springs were scrapped to forge knives for recruits headed north to meet the Yankees.\footnote{Austerman, “Southern Blades”, 42.} An early war edition of *Harpers Weekly* published a sketch of a Confederate training camp in Mississippi. The picture centered on a match in which recruits were contesting their throwing ability. Several Bowie knives were stuck in a tree while a number of men stood around waiting their turn.\footnote{“Camp Life in the Confederate Army-Mississippians Practicing with the Bowie Knife.” Harpers Weekly, Aug 31, 1861, http://0-app.harpweek.com.unccl.coast.uncwil.edu/ (accessed December 1, 2008).}

Early in the war one newspaper called Colonel Bowie’s knife “the facilitator of justifiable homicide.”\footnote{“COLONEL BOWIE AND HIS KNIFE” The Hornsville Tribute, April 25, 1861. http://www.newspaperarchive.com/PdfViewerTags.aspx?img=2779864&firstvisit=true&src=search&currentResult=0. (accessed December 1, 2008).} In 1861, as troops left Weldon, North Carolina, a witness remarked on a connection between the Tar Heel commander and “one of the Texan heroes who fell with Crockett, Bowie and others.”\footnote{“Proceodings of the Courts.” *The Daily Dispatch* April 25, 1861. http://imls.richmond.edu/d/ddr/ (accessed, November 7, 2009).} A symbol of resistance in which its origins were disputable and somewhat mythical, the Bowie knife served as the mark of the man throughout the war. Some legends told of Colonel James Bowie found dead at the Alamo gripping a large knife and surrounded by several butchered Mexicans.
Bowie was thought to have fought the enemy until his last breath and undoubtedly, when many men marched off to war they pictured themselves in such romantic scenarios armed with their trusty blade. In fact many Rebel soldiers went to a photographer before heading off to war to have their carte de visite made with their beloved knife. An identifier and symbol of individualism and hard line manliness, the southerner was aroused by popular culture as possessing the rustic and formidable Bowie knife was his personal way to rebel. Regardless of legend and fact, it was certain that the Bowie knife’s inception into the Civil War was shrouded in myths of manly duals between frontiersmen and Mexicans.  

Southerners were not the only Americans to see the dash of the blade as some Union soldiers were issued the weapon. A New Jersey regiment suffered their first casualty when two soldiers were, “skylarking, one having a bowie knife, the other a revolver.” The knife made its

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172 Ibid.
174 “New-Jersey.” New York Times (1857-Current file), May 6, 1861,
way to the battlefield as well. After the Battle of First Manassas on July 21, 1861, the editor of
the *Baltimore Sun* bragged about a New Yorker who was wounded at the fight. The Fire Zouave
claimed to see “both pistol and Bowie knife, cutting, slashing, carving and shooting almost in the
same moment.”

Confederate Secretary of the Navy S.R. Mallory reported that at the same
battle “furious and persistent charges with the Bowie knife and bayonet, drove the enemy at
every point.”

As men marched off to war they wore the Bowie knife with pride. In Richmond, Virginia
one bystander saw Texas Rangers passing through that city carrying “eight-pound Bowie
knife(s), keen as a razor on both sides.”

Even politicians used the blade as a tool to inspire
audiences to fight. The day President Jefferson Davis arrived in the new Confederate capitol,
Virginia’s ex-governor Henry Wise told men to “Manufacture your blades from old iron, even
though it be the tires of your cart-wheels. Grind and burnish it in the shape of a Bowie-knife, and
put to it any sort of a handle, so that it be strong – ash, hickory or oak.”

The Bowie was even
deemed a formidable weapon by police as a slave in Richmond in 1862 received twenty-five
lashes for being caught with one of these blades.

Even the British were impressed with the
popularity and cultural symbolism given the Bowie knife. In the spring of 1862, London’s
*Morning Herald* predicted the Union’s Peninsular Campaign in Virginia would fail. Virginians,
the editor asserted, were “a people armed with the Bowie-knife and revolver” and would
“butcher every National fugitive in cold blood.”180

The United States Navy also had a fondness for the Bowie knife. In 1864 from his
flagship Philadelphia, Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren bragged in 1864 about his Plymouth
musket’s accoutrements, which he designed. “Its special bayonet is a short, broad, and stout
knife, of the well-known Bowie pattern, the principal use of which I designed to be in the hand
in close conflict, such as boarding.”181 The close quarters fighting the admiral anticipated was
best done with a stout knife, as many boarding raids during the Civil War were so close and
quick that metal weapons were preferred over firearms.

On land the nostalgia of the knife soon gave way to practicality, however. The massive
size of most of the knives and the difficulty in carrying them during long marches made men
disregard their use anywhere but the campground. Even the blade as a utilitarian object gave way
to the more practical folding pocket knife.182 Yet the symbolism of the Bowie knife as a personal
weapon and a distinct Southern mark of rebellion stayed with the cause until the very end. On
April 14, 1865, the night Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, Lewis Powell, although armed with
a revolver, attempted to murder Secretary of War James Seward in his bed with a bowie knife.183
In May 1865, President Jefferson Davis was captured in Georgia while carrying a Bowie knife. It
was reported that “He brandished a Bowie knife of elegant pattern, and showed signs of battle,
but yielded promptly to the persuasion of the Colt revolvers without compelling our men to

180 “PROPHETIC FALLACIES.” New York Times (1857-Current file), May 7, 1862,
181 OR, XV, 623.
proquest.umi.com.unccle.coast.uncwil.edu/pqdweb?RQT=306&TST=1287089611&clientld=15115(accessed October
15, 2010).
The last official Southern resistance was demonstrated by the uniquely personal Confederate weapon.

The Bowie knife was not the only weapon to influence the ideals of chivalry and romance during the war. The sword and saber, both of which were hand-held long blades, portrayed the morals and personal virtues synonymous with military service. These weapons had a history as far back as metal technology itself, and carried with them a symbol of military prowess and the élan of the professional warrior class that was revered in the United States.

The Union and Confederate armies and navies used swords extensively during the war. There were both practical and ideological functions of the sword. Traditionally, officers and senior noncommissioned officers wore the sword as a side-arm. Used for protection in matters of self defense and held aloft when leading an attack during the offense, swordsmanship was generally seen as a gentlemanly and manly skill. In 1817, one of the first orders Major Sylvanus Thayer gave when charged with making West Point a professional military academy, was to order daily sword exercises to be taught by a Sword Master. For decades thereafter “fencing” was part of the academy’s formal instruction. Officers were formally trained in its use as a personal weapon in addition to their revolver. The sword was an issue item and was manufactured or purchased with government money. In this context there was a significant precedent for its use as a weapon. At the outset of the war, new volunteer officers were trained in the craft of effectively using the sword for self defense. One newspaper, however, argued that in the mêlée of volunteering, to the unskilled officer “the sword is often of no more value than a

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187 Nosworthy, Crucible, 141.
rattan in a conflict with an expert swordsman — it would simply invite a speedy death.”188 Indeed, unless the sword was expertly employed, one might as well carry a firearm.

Officially, the sword’s place on the battlefield was as a weapon designed to kill. Throughout the war, the Federal and Confederate governments funded foundries that hammered out a variety of swords. In the Confederacy, despite scant resources, swords were produced until the end of the war because the weapon was thought to be a necessity on the battlefield. Yet the culture of military romanticism that flourished in antebellum America expanded the sword’s role beyond the practical.

In ceremony and in battle, men used their swords to inspire leadership or to display individual bravery. Off the battlefield people used the sword as analogies of aggression, bravery and rebellion; all of which were written into the war’s political and military dialog in orders, official reports, and newspapers. In a Northern newspaper printed in May 1861, President Jefferson Davis was called “the arch rebel of the South” and “wicked.”189 The article’s negative portrayal of Davis claimed that the rebel president “has drawn the sword and thrown away the scabbard”.190 This analogy serves as a metaphor to the South’s resilience. Throwing away the scabbard after drawing the sword implies a determination that does not involve surrender or defeat. Major Thomas Jackson (soon thereafter known as “Stonewall”) used a similar analogy to a body of cadets at the beginning of the war at the Virginia Military Institute. “The time may come, young gentlemen, when your state will need your services, and if that time comes, draw your swords and throw away your scabbards.”191 Not to be taken literally, Jackson implied that

190 Ibid.
when Virginia went to war, the men should go and fight with all they possessed. At an academy that instructed not only the military arts and sciences but also the culture of being a professional military officer, Jackson’s comment embodied the romanticism of warfare. To draw a sword and throw away the scabbard was to sacrifice all, to make and give the ultimate display of manliness and chivalry in the call to the nation’s service.

Another article foresaw the Confederacy’s defeat with an analogy that the “trial of the sword has resulted in their ruin.”¹⁹² The *Richmond Examiner* quoted a senior officer in Memphis, Tennessee: “A battle line must be established with batteries heavy and light; muskets … shotguns, swords and bayonets, by lancers, Bowie-knife and pikemen. Let us turn to the Roman saber and the Bowie-knife.”¹⁹³ This call perfectly demonstrated how tangible edged weapons linked the current war with other romantic and nostalgic eras when knights and Roman infantry decided a battle’s outcome. Also the reference to the classical world of the “Roman saber” was a comparison of the Southern soldier with the soldiers with the greatest civilization of the ancient world. Talk of ancient weapons in battle was not mere rhetoric. Lancers were commonly viewed as a by-gone warrior of pre-Napoleon wars, yet some military circles in Europe debated reintroducing them to the ranks.

Combat proved the sword was more a leadership tool than a utilitarian weapon. Undoubtedly the weapon was often drawn and used effectively against a foe, but in the age of the revolver and rifle-musket, the sword served more as a status identifier and leadership utensil than as a weapon. Even in the heat of combat, the leadership aspect of the sword came out in that men seemed to naturally use it in a way that personified the romanticism of war. Language used in

post-action reports pointed to characteristics that were identified with military romanticism, chivalry, and knightliness. Confederate General Earl Van Dorn reported an engagement in Mississippi in 1862, where he hoped a wounded “Lieutenant Leftwick may recover and yet draw his sword in the sacred cause for which he has already fought on several fields.”\textsuperscript{194} In Atlanta, Georgia, after a Confederate attack in July 1864, General D. C. Govan reported that “Lieut. Col. Anderson Watkins was stricken down, sword in hand… he was a brave soldier, a gifted and valuable officer, possessed of great courage, and having a high sense of duty.”\textsuperscript{195} Confederate Lieutenant Colonel S. M. Hyams reported that during a charge in 1861 that, “Lieutenant Lacey, of the Shreveport Rangers, sprang on a log, waved his sword, and called, “Come on, Caddo!”\textsuperscript{196} The young officer’s leadership in the charge was to wave his sword.

Civil War soldiers understood that waving a sword was a symbolic motivating gesture during an attack. Gallantry and waving one’s sword were synonymous. Lieutenant Bancroft of the Thirty Eighth U. S. Colored Troops was honorably mentioned for his daring and endurance in battle. Bancroft was “shot through the hip at the swamp, he crawled forward on his hands and knees, waving his sword and cheering his men to follow.”\textsuperscript{197} Other acts inspired colorful reports as men who saw the actions of brave men did their best to annotate their deeds. Captain James Grimsley of the Twenty-First Indiana Infantry honored his fallen adjutant by reporting that the fallen man was “waving his sword and cheering us on to deeds of duty and daring, our accomplished, gallant, brave, and long-to-be-mourned adjutant, Matthew A. Latham, was killed.”\textsuperscript{198} As a symbolic gesture of bravado, leaders waived their swords to inspire their men in action. Regardless, the act of waving one’s sword overhead individualized the officer as a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textit{OR.} ser. 1, vol. 10, pt. I 808.
\item \textit{OR.} ser. 1, vol. 38, pt. III 739.
\item \textit{OR.} ser. 1, vol. 3, 115.
\item \textit{OR.} ser. 1, vol. 42, pt. III 168.
\item \textit{OR.} ser. 1, vol. 15, 74.
\end{thebibliography}
leader, the center of spirit which embodied the American warrior class. Union officer Major O. H. Whittmore reported the death of Union officer Captain Kelty in Louisiana in 1862 and in doing so, expressed reverence when describing his fallen subordinate.

“Captain Kelty, of Company I, was ordered to deploy his company as skirmishers on the right, and in the performance of his duty fell bravely at the head of his company. No truer soldier ever drew his sword, and no words of mine in this report can do justice to his memory. In him the regiment lost a model officer, and one whose example and soldierly conduct will never be forgotten.”

Kelty was obviously well liked and respected. His commander saw fit to describe the dead officer’s dedication to his profession with the proverbial romanticism of the sword.

![Figure 7: A Confederate general leading a charge at Gettysburg, 1863.](image)

Officers’ swords were also gifts of gratitude, symbols of command and when defeated, gentlemanly surrender. A sword for fighting men as a gift was symbolic as it was viewed as the traditional weapon of a gentleman. In 1861 the city of Bridgeport, Connecticut presented the officers of Company D, Third Connecticut Volunteers a sword because their organizer and

199 *OR*. ser. 1, vol. 15, 66.
commander “deserves, for his gallant ancestors and himself, more than a passing notice.”

When the blockade runner Jenny and Fanny was making the trek from Nassau to Wilmington, North Carolina, it was sunk. Inside the hull was a handsome gold presentation sword for General Robert E. Lee. Crew members reported that “it was destroyed with the vessel.” After his victory at Roanoke Island, North Carolina, in February 1862, Union General Ambrose Burnside was presented an $800 Tiffany & Company sword. The Rhode Island Legislature purchased the item for presentation to the general. Without doubt, the general never used the sword in combat or ever drew it in anger. The sterling silver piece was symbolic; a gift which honored an officer whose service was appreciated. Outgoing commanders also received swords from their subordinates. Union General John Hatch received a sword complete with sash and belt from his junior officers for “their esteem for him as a gentleman and as a General.”

In cases of surrender, it was customary for the surrendering officer to give his sword to the captor. This tradition was not one confined to the American Civil War, but it was nonetheless respected and generally practiced. During a bayonet charge led my Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, a Confederate officer, so surprised and shocked by the sudden charge, fired at Chamberlain with his revolver and handed him his sword in surrender shortly thereafter.

Other examples of swords being surrendered were not so dramatic. During an attack on Fort Stedman, Virginia, Union General Napoleon McLaughlen reported that he “was surrounded by the rebels, whom I had supposed to be my men, and sent to the rear, where I found General

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202 OR. IX, 474.
205 OR. ser. 1, vol. 27, pt. 1, 624.
Gordon, to whom I delivered my sword, and was sent by him to Petersburg.” Following etiquette, McLaughlen voluntarily gave his sword to his captor.

So pervasive and gentlemanly were the customs and tradition of surrendering one’s sword that if the ritual were broken in any way, a feeling of abomination would be rendered to the defeated officer. After the Battle of Mobile Bay, Union Rear Admiral D. G. Farragut lambasted the Confederate commander of the defeated Fort Morgan. Farragut reported: “But since I have heard of the wanton destruction of the public property, and his childish behavior in denying that he had a sword to deliver up after manifesting his submission by showing the white flag on his fort.” The sword was viewed as a symbol of personal accomplishment of the officer who defeated its owner. Even capturing the sword without a battle was significant in that one felt like a victor by acquiring a significant, tangible identifier of their foe. Union General John Sanborn bragged in his after action report that he captured a Confederate general’s sword outside Kansas City, Missouri in 1864. The spirited attack hit the enemy “so rapidly that he captured a staff officer of General Cabell’s and the general’s sword.” General Cabell’s sword was undoubtedly delivered to the attacking commander as a war prize.

The sword served in a function beyond the realm of self defense. A designator of leadership, hierarchy in rank, a gift or a symbol of gentlemanly surrender or victory, the sword’s cultural role was pervasive. Yet the sword’s stouter cousin, the saber, fit an entirely different mold. Still cultural in its own sense, the saber served a formidable role as a practical offensive weapon for an entire branch of both armies: the cavalry.

Mid-nineteenth improvements in firearm technology increased the range and accuracy of the infantryman’s rifle. This changed how armies fought, both by limiting the use of hand held edged weapons and how units, such as cavalry, operated with those weapons. The rifle-musket changed the cavalry’s mission for several reasons. Foremost was the fact that cavalry frontal attacks were less effective against infantry armed with the new rifles. Not only did the horseman pose a very large target, but an infantryman could hit his mark at greater ranges when armed with the rifle-musket. The cavalry charge, the most formidable offensive tactic for the cavalry, was forevermore constrained to narrower windows of opportunity by the effects of the rifle-musket on men and beast alike.

The extended range of the rifle-muskets and cannons, and the use of the bayonet against horsemen in close action limited the role of the cavalry. Because of this, Confederate cavalry in particular limited their maneuvers to deception operations, reconnaissance, early warning for larger infantry units, and raids.209 The vulnerability of a mounted force kept the cavalry’s offensive role confined to small harassment operations and occasional charges against disorganized forces already on the brink of disintegration.

The weapons the Confederate and Federal cavalry used were determined by terrain and the specific tasks the unit commander was assigned to perform. For example, Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forest had his men carry shotguns and pistols.210 One reason for this was that the terrain Forest operated in, the American West, was more densely wooded than in the East. The lack of sabers was due in large part because the open field saber charge was a shock

tactic designed to horrify the enemy into breaking and running.\textsuperscript{211} The scarcity of open fields took away the advantages of this specific tactic. Forest’s shotguns allowed for the desired shock effect during a charge and gave the rider a better chance of hitting his foe while riding. Other commanders, like Confederate General John S. Mosby, operated in mountainous terrain and had his men carry two six-shot revolvers.\textsuperscript{212} A weapon commonly used for personal defense, the multi-shot revolver allowed for a dozen shots to be fired in an offensive charge or raid. Once expended the cavalryman was out of the fight until he could re-load, which could take several minutes.

With Union cavalry, especially in the later years of the war, the saber offered an offensive weapon that did not run out of bullets. In an attack in the open field, the blows delivered by a spirited cavalry charge could decimate an infantry formation, artillery battery, or any unit not prepared to receive a mounted strike. Even if the blows did not land on the enemy, charging horsemen wielding heavy sabers could send any faltering infantry unit into chaos. As an offensive weapon, the saber was most effective in the open field charge. Though some thought it antiquated at the beginning of the war, many commanders, especially Confederates, wished for its advantage later in the war. This is because cavalry saber charges were best countered in kind.\textsuperscript{213}

In New Bern, North Carolina, Union General Ambrose Burnside told Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that “this regiment was only armed with sabers and pistols, which I am convinced is a most excellent general rule to adopt in cavalry.”\textsuperscript{214} Burnside’s letter went on to explain his need for carbines, as swampy interior of northern North Carolina did not conform to the open

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid. 79.  
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid, 80.  
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid, 80.  
\textsuperscript{214} OR. ser. 1, vol. 9, 403.
terrain in which the saber was most effective. Other areas of operation were more suited to the heavy blade. During the war the Second Iowa Cavalry Squadron, which was stationed in the far West, had a troop armed with the saber because the terrain occasionally favored the use of that weapon specifically.\textsuperscript{215}

![Figure 8: Polished Union cavalrymen pose with their sabers.](image)

For a cavalry commander the benefits of arming a single troop with sabers made the unit more flexible and diverse in its offensive capability. This type of specialized unit could also serve as the reserve force in normal operations.

Aside from organized battle, hand held edged weapons were used to carry out crimes of passion. During the Civil War men sometimes committed murder with edged weapons when there was a clear availability to use firearms instead. At Fort Pillow for example, black civilians, Union soldiers and white officers were killed when Confederate soldiers under General Nathan Bedford Forest overran the West Tennessee fort. Immediately following the Union surrender, the mostly black garrison and its white officers were shown no quarter. \textit{Harpers Weekly} reported

\textsuperscript{215} Nosworthy, \textit{Crucible}, 291.

that “Both white and black were bayoneted, shot, or sabred; even dead bodies were horribly mutilated, and children of seven and eight years, and several negro women killed in cold blood.” H. N. Revelle, a witness to the murders, reported in a sworn statement that he “saw another negro struck on the head with a saber by a rebel soldier. I suppose he was also killed. One more just in front of me was knocked down with the butt of a musket.” Ransom Anderson, a black Union soldier, also gave his oral testimony about the events at Fort Pillow. After Anderson’s surrender he claimed that “while a prisoner and wounded I was further wounded by being cut in the head and hands by one Lieutenant Williams, C. S. Army.” “I also certify,” Anderson stated, “that I saw Coolie Pride, of the same regiment and the same company, stabbed by a rebel soldier with a bayonet and the bayonet broken off in his body, after the said Coolie Pride had been taken prisoner by the Confederates. In 1862 Confederate cavalry attacked a Union picket line near the Little Red River in Arkansas. During a frenzy to escape, Second Lieutenant Henry Neun saw “rebels cutting Private Wurges…with a Bowie knife” after the man apparently tried to surrender.

The hatred displayed by some soldiers during the war manifested itself in the deliberate choice of using a weapon that was in one’s grasp, which was essentially an extension of their hand. The events at Fort Pillow and the Little Red River exemplify that the use of edged weapons during the war often had symbolic purposes. Hatred for black soldiers and their white officers sometimes provoked Southerners to slay their captors, much like chivalry motivated sword-wheeling officers leading a charge. Although murder was more vicious and considered a

218 OR. ser. 1, vol. 31, 529.
219 OR. ser. 1, vol. 32, 519
220 ibid.
221 OR series 1, volume 13, 79.
crime by the laws of war, it was nonetheless an action based on personal values and culture and executed with a personalized tool.

Edged weapons offered the Union and Confederate soldier an opportunity to express himself in a manner understood but rarely spoken. Regardless of age, training, economic class, civilian profession, or intellect, the variety of sharpened steel available to soldiers offered each individual the means to make himself a unique figure. During the war, the hand held edged weapon carried a message when it was included in a photo, worn on the hip, raised in the attack, or used as the coup de grace. Before the end of the first year of the Civil War, every soldier in both Union and Confederate armies carried the rifle-musket. These deadly rifles made the sword, saber and Bowie knife all but obsolete. Nevertheless, soldiers on both sides continued to use, carry and demand their manufacture for purposes without much tactical merit.

Figure 9: Atrocities and murder were often carried out with metal edged weapons.

Regular and volunteer officers alike ignored the benefits of advanced weapon technology and instead relied on conservative Napoleonic tactics and the roots of French influence. This attitude ran so deep that it fundamentally effected how the professional officer corps was created and how it fought the biggest war ever fought in the Western Hemisphere.
CONCLUSION

The decades between the end of the American Revolution and 1861 saw American men develop a character that was individualistic, martial, and often romantic. From its inception as an English settlement, violence and warfare characterized American existence because little in terms of land or liberty was gained without conflict. Because of this unfortunate fact, physical security was not a given to many Americans. For decades after independence a turbulent frontier, European encroachment, and the constant threat of slave insurrection perpetuated an acceptance of militant virtue. Knowing how to fight, especially on the frontier, was a matter of survival and every able body man was taught how to defend himself and his community. Being a member of the local militia in the South was the norm for white males, particularly after the Haitian slave revolt in the late eighteenth century. These phenomena set the stage for a militant character that had become imbedded in the American male psyche in the decades leading up to the Civil War.

A humble economy and abuses dealt by foreign armies on American citizens made most feel apprehensive about forming a permanent standing army. But as the national economy grew with the spreading of frontiers and maritime commerce, the importance of national defense was recognized. The Quasi War with France and the War of 1812 solidified the need for an army, and by the early 1820s the country was on track in developing a professional full-time force. The men who set the very first cultural and philosophical tones of the U.S. Army officer corps and the training the army conducted were Francophiles. They studied the same books as Napoleon I and built American forts with French engineering techniques. The United States Military Academy’s library had thousands of books that were in French, and the French way of war was lectured in classrooms and discussed in off-duty social groups like the “Napoleon Club.”
French zeal and military prowess smacked of romance and pluck to American men. The French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars transformed how Western armies fought in that the citizen soldier was part of a grand force that defeated the professional armies of the monarchs. Free men armed with the bayonet and pike proved that courage and aggressive action used in the offense, all but guaranteed victory. Americans respected Napoleon for his military accomplishments even after his defeat in 1815. The antebellum era witnessed the creation of popular histories and treatises that American men studied and revered. Both civilian and military men enjoyed works by Jomini and others who translated his works. Many army officers read them because they believed it was part of their professional development. Civilians read the books because the stories were enlightening and entertaining. An American culture that idolized the romantic soldier was created by this popular literature. The decades of peace that followed Napoleon’s last battle in 1815 surely propagated delusions of grandeur about warfare and its glory. Unfortunately, what was created would deceive many into believing that battles could be won with mere will and courage. The tangible object that revealed that misconception was the edged weapon.

For the men who fought in the Civil War, edged weapons were many things. Some men used them to project something very personal, aggressive, and often nostalgic. Other men saw them as practical tools for getting the job done. Some could not distinguish the difference and attempted to be pragmatic but could not help themselves and were motivated by the idealism and romance of using metal weapons. The Bowie knife was an individual weapon that was clouded in mythical legend. It resembled the ancient Roman short sword - heavy, robust, and deadly in determined hands. But its bulkiness narrowed its use to ship boarding, bar brawling and apparently political assassination. The sword had been on battlefields for so long that despite its
questionable usefulness before the Civil War, it remained an issued item and soldiers practiced its employment as a defensive weapon. Many swords were strictly ceremonial or were gifts of gratitude. A man’s sword was worn on the hip, was an extension of his arm and did not leave its owner except in honorable surrender. It was more of a symbol than a weapon, and was raised over a leader’s head to rally and encourage men on a field where voices were drowned-out by guns and cannon. The saber, however, was a tool with an unusually high and fast platform: the horse. Speed and ferocity were essential in a cavalry strike and the saber never had to be reloaded and would never jam. Its heavy blade and curved edge made it as much of a sharp club as a weapon. Although the rifle-musket and the revolver narrowed the cavalry saber’s use, it remained an effective weapon when terrain allowed for a quick strike on a surprised enemy.

The bayonet was in a category of its own. Its lineage was far more complex than other metal blades because it was part of a combined weapon system that was used both successfully and improperly throughout the war. It was misused because of ignorance, cultural persuasion and Napoleonic nostalgia. It was also brilliantly employed by men who recognized the slow rate of fire of the rifle-musket and of the bayonet’s value as a shock weapon.
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