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## Virginia's Reaction to John Brown's Raid: Rebirth of a Strong State Militia

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VIRGINIA'S REACTION TO JOHN BROWN'S RAID:  
REBIRTH OF A STRONG STATE MILITIA

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by  
Todd Small  
1971

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explain the manner in which white Virginians reacted to John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry. The study begins with the raid on October 16, 1859, and ends with the passage of a military reorganization act by the Virginia General Assembly on March 30, 1860.

The research for this investigation was limited to the primary and secondary source materials available in the Earl Gregg Swem Library at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia and the Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia. The most useful and informative sources were the editorials and news articles in the Lynchburg Daily Virginian and the Richmond Daily Dispatch.

Research findings suggest that John Brown's raid prompted Virginia's white citizens to prepare for possible future attacks by strengthening a militia system which had been previously neglected. As a result of this process, the state's military forces were better prepared for the Civil War.

VIRGINIA'S REACTION TO JOHN BROWN'S RAID:  
REBIRTH OF A STRONG STATE MILITIA

## INTRODUCTION

Crossing the Potomac River from Maryland and entering Virginia on the night of October 16, 1859, John Brown and his band of twenty-two militant abolitionists seized the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry and dispersed about the neighboring countryside attempting to liberate the slaves and capture their white masters. With several captives, Brown and his men took refuge in the arsenal where they were attacked the following morning by armed citizens of Harper's Ferry and members of the state militia sent by Governor Henry Wise. By nightfall, the abolitionists had retreated to the arsenal's engine room and, on the morning of October 18, they were captured by a force of United States Marines under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee.<sup>1</sup>

Although Virginia's slaves did not respond to Brown's irrational attempt to incite a servile insurrection, the white citizens reacted to his futile efforts with furious contempt. The possibility of a violent slave rebellion struck fear into the hearts of many white Southerners. And, as

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<sup>1</sup>The most interesting account of Brown's raid is contained in Virginia's General Assembly's Report Of The Joint Committee On The Harper's Ferry Outrages January 26, 1860. This report gives the reader vivid insights into the mood of Virginia after the attack on Harper's Ferry.



Brown's venture received more and more praise from fanatical Northern abolitionists, the frenzied reaction of the South to the raid reached even greater proportions.

Contempt in the South for the zealous abolitionists who praised Brown's deed often overshadowed the fact that many Northerners were quick to denounce the entire affair. On the other hand, the Southern fears were certainly not alleviated by the actions and attitudes of those Northern citizens who, after the execution of Brown, declared him a martyr and received his body with the reverence due a true hero. To a Southerner, particularly to a Virginian whose state had been attacked, this sentiment was a definite indication that other invasions were possible, if not probable; therefore, most white inhabitants of the South concluded that they must be prepared to protect their property in case of future aggression. The editors of the Lynchburg Daily Virginian expressed this belief when they wrote:

Recent events upon our border show that we know not at what moment we may be approached by an insidious enemy, with a view either of inciting a servile insurrection, or of retaliation for the ignominious death to which we have devoted Brown and his guilty associates in the late foray. Our Pennsylvania border, bristling with mountains, affords a secure retreat, in their almost inaccessible gorges, for the outlaws who may be stimulated, either by anti-slavery money or prejudices, to avenge the execution of Brown. They may not dare to challenge us to an open field and a fair fight--but they may harass and annoy us, in various ways, by petty depra-dations [sic].

by isolated cases of murder, and by applying the stealthy torch of the incendiary in the darkness of the night.<sup>2</sup>

This widespread belief in the probability of future attacks led to an outburst of military enthusiasm throughout the entire state. Responding to the public's reaction and to Brown's assault, Virginia's legislators appointed an investigative committee to examine the events surrounding the raid and also moved to reorganize the state's militia system which, according to John S. Wise, the son of Governor Henry Wise, "was utterly inefficient, having nothing but skeleton organization."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 28, 1859.

<sup>3</sup>John S. Wise, The End Of An Era, (Boston, 1899), 119.

## CHAPTER I

### THE DETERIORATION OF VIRGINIA'S MILITIA SYSTEM

The deterioration of Virginia's militia system began as early as 1850. In his annual report for that year, Adjutant General William H. Richardson described the militia as being in a condition of confusion and inefficiency. The Adjutant General stated that only 123,733 men, approximately one-third of the white male population, had mustered for the state militia. However, Richardson believed the state's actual military force to have been much larger because several thousand volunteers had not been included in the official militia returns.<sup>4</sup> Describing the value of the

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<sup>4</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, Year Ending September 30, 1850, (Richmond, 1850), 7. Virginia law required all able-bodied men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to be members of the compulsory militia or the militia of the line, Virginia's largest military force. Although these militiamen had to participate in the annual regimental musters, they were not issued uniforms by the state and were armed only in emergency situations. Described as citizen-soldiers, the members of the line militia had little discipline, training or spirit. And, they received payment only for active duty.

In Virginia, however, there was another large group of militiamen known as volunteers. Normally, volunteer companies were made of more than fifty men who enlisted voluntarily and purchased their own uniforms. Once the company procured their uniforms, the state would provide arms. Volunteer companies were assigned to militia of the line regiments and, as a result, usually attended the regimental musters.

volunteer companies and expressing fear for their well-being, the Adjutant General declared:

I feel it an imperative duty again to ask your excellency's [the Governor] attention to the condition of the volunteer corps of the state--almost her sole reliance for any military service, and to the urgent necessity of affording them more substantial support than they have hitherto received. Without this, it is much to be apprehended that they will continue to decline or be generally disbanded.<sup>5</sup>

General Richardson's anxiety was shared by other concerned Virginians who remembered the more glorious days of military activity. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Virginia's militiamen and volunteers played an important role in domestic defense. These soldiers often displayed their strength whenever there were rumors afloat of a slave revolt. And, in the case of an actual rebellion, the local militia was immediately called to duty.<sup>6</sup> Besides these functions, the militia units and the volunteer corps provided their communities with hours of entertainment through military exercises and parades.<sup>7</sup> But by the beginning of

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>6</sup>John A. Cutchins, A Famous Command: The Richmond Light Infantry Blues, (Richmond, 1934), 3n. For more information on the role of the Virginia militia in the early nineteenth century, see John Hope Franklin, The Militant South 1800-1861, (Cambridge, 1956), 78.

<sup>7</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Oct. 26, Oct. 27, and Nov. 9, 1859. These articles also describe Lynchburg's military forces during the pinnacle of their popularity.

the 1850's, the public interest in martial affairs began to decline and, as a result, many alert citizens like the Adjutant General became increasingly alarmed.<sup>8</sup>

Despite General Richardson's concern, the degeneration of the militia system, including the volunteer companies, continued during the following years. An examination of the annual returns made to the Adjutant General shows the steady decline of the state militia. In fact, the scarcity of returns in 1852 forced Richardson to repeat the more complete returns of 1851. In his annual report, he wrote:

The returns to this office for the present year do not enable me to make up the annual consolidated return from them with justice to the state-- the falling off in the reported force of 15 out of 27 brigades, is more than 8,000 men. I have therefore adopted the returns of 1851.<sup>9</sup>

And the situation did not improve, for the years 1853 to 1858 produced nothing from a military standpoint but inactivity.<sup>10</sup> In 1854, only seventy-five regiments of the line out of a total of one hundred and eighty-five reported to the Adjutant General, the administrative head of the

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<sup>8</sup>Franklin, The Militant South 1800-1861, 188.

<sup>9</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, Year Ending September 30, 1852, (Richmond, 1852), 2.

<sup>10</sup>Moreau B. C. Chambers, "The Militia Crisis," Virginia Cavalcade, XVI (Spring 1967), 14.

state militia. These returns listed Virginia's military strength at 50,679 men.<sup>11</sup> By 1856, the aggregate strength of the militia of the line had fallen to 18,415 citizen-soldiers.<sup>12</sup> A further decline in the number of militia-men was revealed in 1857 when the enrollment was 9,489. Adjutant General Richardson stated that returns were "received from only 13 out of 185 regiments of the line, two regiments of volunteers, the superintendent of the military institute and the captain of the public guard."<sup>13</sup>

This decrease in the numerical strength of the state militia took place despite the fact that the militia structure as embodied in the Virginia Code of 1849<sup>14</sup> was one on which the citizens and the state government could have constructed a strong military organization. In The Code of 1849, nine chapters were devoted to laws governing the state militia. According to The Code, any "able-bodied

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<sup>11</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, Year Ending September 30, 1854, (Richmond, 1854), 3-4.

<sup>12</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, Year Ending September 30, 1856, (Richmond, 1856), 3.

<sup>13</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, Year Ending September 30, 1857, (Richmond, 1857), 29.

<sup>14</sup>The Virginia Code of 1849 is a compilation of laws in effect in 1849. The militia laws in The Code of 1849 had their origins in colonial times and were added to and revised many times before the compilation was made in 1849. In the following pages of this paper, the actual militia laws upon which The Code of 1849 was based will be specifically noted in the footnotes.

male" resident of Virginia between eighteen and forty-five years of age was "subject to military duty."<sup>15</sup> Certain people, however, could be legally exempt from military duty. For example, sheriffs, ministers, ferrymen, post-masters, jail and hospital superintendents, and inspectors of tobacco were exempt from all military duty while others, including millers, lock-keepers, and officers of banks, were liable to a military draft only in time of crisis.<sup>16</sup>

The organizational foundation of the state militia was the formation of divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, and companies. The Code called for the creation of five divisions and twenty-six brigades.<sup>17</sup> The five divisions, each commanded by a major general, were divided into the twenty-six brigades under the command of a brigadier general. In accordance with Virginia law, each brigade was to contain men from several counties. Also, the law specified that each regiment of the state militia

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<sup>15</sup>The Code Of Virginia: With The Declaration Of Independence And Constitution Of The United States; And The Declaration Of Rights And Constitution Of Virginia, (Richmond, 1849), 119. This law was based on acts passed by the United States Congress in May, 1792 and the Virginia legislature of 1833-1834.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 120-121. Laws regarding military exemptions were passed by the United States Congress in May, 1792 and the Virginia legislature of 1833-1834 and 1846-1847.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 123. The basis of this law was an act of the United States Congress dated May, 1792.

was to "be composed of two battalions, and the regiments of infantry of the line shall consist of at least four hundred men, rank and file."<sup>18</sup>

To prevent disintegration of the military strength of the state, The Code of 1849 did not permit the dissolution of an established regiment until the number of its rank and file members fell below three hundred men. It was also required that each infantry battalion consist of "at least four companies of the line, besides such volunteer companies as may be attached thereto."<sup>19</sup>

The companies of the line were the basic militia units of the state of Virginia. Each company was located within the geographical boundaries of a company district from which its men were acquired. As set up in The Code, every company of the line was to be made up of at least fifty men and not more than one hundred.<sup>20</sup> A volunteer company, on the other hand, consisted of between forty-five and eighty men, each of whom enlisted voluntarily.<sup>21</sup> If a volunteer company

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 125. This law emanated from a combination of acts passed by the Virginia legislatures of 1833-1834, 1839-1840, and 1841-1842.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 136. The Virginia legislature of 1833-1834 wrote this law.



failed within a period of twelve months to adopt a military uniform or to keep its membership above the minimum of forty-five, it would be dissolved with the remaining members enrolling in the companies of the line in the districts in which they were residents.<sup>22</sup>

Virginia statutes ruled that each regiment of the line had to muster annually either in the month of April or May. Two separate battalion musters in those months, however, could legally replace the annual regimental muster. In addition to the regimental musters, every company of the line was expected to muster semi-annually in April and October. The volunteer companies, while participating in the semi-annual musters of the line companies, were compelled to hold two additional musters each year.<sup>23</sup> And, for a three day period immediately preceding the regimental muster or the first battalion muster, all commissioned officers of each regiment met with the regimental adjutants and sergeant-majors to receive training in disciplinary and military matters.<sup>24</sup> Thus, by demanding regimental and company

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 138. This law was enacted by the Virginia legislature of 1833-1834.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 132-137. The laws concerning militia musters were adopted by the Virginia legislatures of 1833-1834, 1834-1835, and 1845-1846.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 134. This law was passed by the Virginia legislature of 1833-1834.

musters as well as a three-day training period for commissioned officers, the laws governing the state militia system established on paper an educated and well-prepared militia. Nevertheless, this militia structure actually fell victim to the extensive apathy displayed toward military affairs by many Virginians.

Apprehensive over what might be the result of this public apathy, Adjutant General Richardson warned his fellow citizens of the seriousness of the crisis facing Virginia's militia in 1852 when he wrote:

The militia system has in fact approached so nearly to dissolution, that unless some measures for a more effective organization be promptly adopted, it would be better at once to abandon the shadow (for it is nothing more) of "public defence," and so to save the money which is annually drawn from the treasury without the least benefit in any way.<sup>25</sup>

Both the citizens and the legislators disregarded this plea, for again in 1854 the Adjutant General admonished the Governor of the dangerous prevailing passion "for avoiding all militia duty."<sup>26</sup> Despite these warnings, civilian support for the militia steadily decreased and the state legislators, instead of honoring the wishes of the Adjutant General, further

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<sup>25</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, 1852, 3.

<sup>26</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, 1854, 3.

weakened the existing militia structure as embodied in The Code of 1849.

The most destructive legislation was the militia act of 1853. Entitled "An ACT providing for the enrollment of the militia by the commissioners of the revenue, the abolition of musters, and a reorganization of the volunteer corps," this statute placed public defense in the hands of the volunteer companies and abolished most of the duties of the line militia. As a result, the state of Virginia could not compel individuals to serve in the military except during a declared emergency.<sup>27</sup>

The 1853 military law repealed several sections of the militia laws in The Code of 1849. Section one of chapter twenty-five of the 1849 statute book, requiring an annual regimental muster in April or May, was revoked. And the section demanding a three-day training period for commissioned officers was abrogated.<sup>28</sup> Concerning musters, the act of 1853 stated:

There shall be no musters of the militia, except of companies, battalions and regiments of volunteers after the

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<sup>27</sup>Chambers, "The Militia Crisis," 12.

<sup>28</sup>"An ACT providing for the enrollment of the militia by the commissioners of the revenue, the abolition of musters, and a reorganization of the volunteer corps" in Acts Of The General Assembly of Virginia Passed In 1852-3, Seventy-Seventh Year Of The Commonwealth, (Richmond, 1853), 34-35.

month of June in the present year.<sup>29</sup>

While the regimental musters of the militia of the line were replaced by an annual battalion or regimental muster of volunteers in either April, May or June, volunteer companies were also expected to muster four additional times in the same year. Preceding the yearly battalion or regimental muster, the commissioned officers of the volunteer battalions and regiments were to participate in a period of military training, the length of which was to be determined by the number of companies comprising the battalion or regiment.<sup>30</sup>

The law of 1853 applied the old organizational guidelines of the militia of the line to the new volunteer system; therefore, the volunteer companies were arranged into battalions and regiments. A battalion was formed when two or three infantry, light infantry, or rifle volunteer companies agreed to incorporate and to muster together. If six, seven or eight infantry, light infantry, or rifle companies joined together in a similar agreement, they would be classified as a regiment with the privilege of electing a colonel, lieutenant colonel, and major.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 35.

The destruction of the militia of the line and the establishment of the volunteer companies as the primary source of public defense was, in General Richardson's opinion, the main reason for the common indifference shown toward the state militia during the mid-1850's. Reporting to the Governor in 1855, Richardson wrote:

According to your excellency's request, I come now to a consideration of the existing militia laws, and the military defences of the state under the operation of those laws, and beg leave here to repeat the following portion of my report to you of January 23d 1854:

"As regards the operation of the act of 1st April 1853, I trust I shall be excused for saying that it is so mischievous in its tendency, and in an important part impracticable that the best amendment would be total repeal of it, except only so much as requires the enrollment by commissioners of the revenue. It appears to have been constructed upon what will prove an erroneous hypothesis, that by abolishing musters and breaking down the militia of the line, a volunteer force will spring up throughout the state. There never was a greater mistake. Every experienced officer knows that no system of public defence can be sustained that is not based upon some organization of the militia of the line; and it is vain to expect that any shadow of military force can be kept up, when no man is obliged to muster. Unpalatable as it may be to many, every able bodied man between the ages of 18 and 45 owes this service to the state, and it should be cheerfully rendered by all whenever it is necessary. And although this militia cannot be disciplined in time of peace, a sufficient organization may be sustained without being burdensome to the people, and a uniform course of tactical instruction established for the officers, which will qualify them for disciplining and commanding the militia whenever it is called

into service. However acceptable this act may be to many influential citizens, that should not prevent a full and candid examination of its defects, and I trust will not. The occurrence of war, or a startling domestic tragedy like that of 1831, ought not to find a great state unprepared."<sup>32</sup>

General Richardson's obvious dislike for the militia act of 1853 did not cause him to blame it entirely for the difficulties facing Virginia's militia. He believed that the doubt surrounding the actual number of men in the state's volunteer force was another catalyst for the lack of interest displayed by Virginia's populace toward military matters. As early as 1850, Richardson had complained that the failure of the state government to impose fines upon those commands which neglected to report their strength was a major shortcoming of the militia laws.<sup>33</sup> In the latter years of the decade, this neglect forced the Adjutant General to estimate the number of volunteer troops in the state and, as a result, produced a mood of uncertainty on which public apathy could thrive. In 1855, he surmised the number of volunteers to

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<sup>32</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, Year Ending September 30, 1855, (Richmond, 1855), 14.

<sup>33</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, 1850, 3. According to John Hope Franklin, author of The Militant South 1800-1861, Virginia was not the only Southern state to possess a dilapidated militia system. Franklin states that during "the mid-fifties the anxieties of some citizens of the upper South regarding their militia bordered on hysteria." See Franklin, The Militant South 1800-1861, 188.

be one thousand. This tiny group of men together with the public guard and the cadets at the Virginia Military Institute was the state's only organized military force.<sup>34</sup>

Better known as the State Guard, the public guard was a small body of professional soldiers stationed at Richmond to protect the Virginia State Armory.<sup>35</sup> These men, under the command of Captain Charles Dimmock, were recognized by Adjutant General Richardson as very capable soldiers. Writing in the midst of Virginia's martial depression, Richardson stated that the public guard was "in the high state of discipline and efficiency which has characterized it for some years past."<sup>36</sup> The pride of those Virginians who were interested in military affairs, however, was the corps of cadets at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington. The Institute was rapidly winning recognition for the well-disciplined and highly proficient soldiers it produced; furthermore, many nineteenth century Virginians believed that the cadets graduating from V.M.I. were as competent

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<sup>34</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, 1855, 3.

<sup>35</sup>A professional soldier is one who made his living in the state militia. While volunteers and members of the militia of the line were citizen-soldiers, the members of the State Guard were full-time military men.

<sup>36</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, 1857, 29.

as their counterparts from the United States Military Academy.<sup>37</sup>

It was the duty of these young cadets to protect the State Arsenal in Lexington which, together with the Richmond State Armory, housed the munitions of Virginia. But, by disbanding the line militia, the militia act of 1853 actually depleted the supply of arms located in both the Armory and the Arsenal, for a large number of the state's small firearms remained in the possession of the members of the abolished militia of the line. In General Richardson's opinion, it would have been impossible to collect these arms as many of them had been put to waste or completely destroyed. Thus, the Adjutant General thought it doubtful that the value of these weapons would even meet the cost of gathering them.<sup>38</sup>

The uncertain strength of the volunteer military force of the state and the depleted arms supply certainly alarmed governmental officials, particularly Adjutant General Richardson

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<sup>37</sup>Chambers, "The Militia Crisis," 13. For further evaluation of the cadets of V.M.I., see the editorial in the Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 10, 1859, and a news item in the Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 4, 1859. After Brown's capture and until his execution, the cadets were called upon by Governor Wise to aid in protecting the state from other expected invasions. Their role in this capacity will be discussed in later pages of this thesis.

<sup>38</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, 1854, 3.



and Governor Wise. The deterioration of the state militia definitely troubled the Adjutant General and, writing in 1855, he declared that it was his "conviction that a prompt and thorough organization of the militia, combined with all the aid and encouragement which can be given to the volunteer corps in all quarters, ought not to be delayed beyond the coming session of the general assembly."<sup>39</sup> Reporting to the Governor the next year, Richardson again asked for a thorough reorganization of the militia and suggested that the use of young men in both field and staff positions would be extremely beneficial in enhancing the strength of the state's military organization.<sup>40</sup> Adopting the Adjutant General's suggestions, Governor Wise recommended the establishment of a new state militia composed of white men between the ages of twenty-four and forty-five years. To insure discipline and efficiency, the Governor proposed that this group of men be placed under the strict supervision of brigade inspectors. Notwithstanding the desires of the Adjutant General and Governor Wise, the state legislature disregarded the issue of military reorganization in 1857; however, as Virginians became increasingly concerned over the sectional differences of the nation, they formed

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<sup>39</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, 1855, 15.

<sup>40</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, 1856, 3.

several new volunteer companies. Responding to this revival of martial spirit, the legislature enacted into law in 1858 a modified version of the Governor's recommendation.<sup>41</sup>

Basically, the 1858 act reestablished the militia system as found in The Code of 1849.<sup>42</sup> The statute read:

There shall be one troop of cavalry, one company of artillery, and not more than two companies of light infantry or riflemen, as the case may be, to each regiment of the line. Such companies shall consist of not less than fifty nor more than eighty men, rank and file, to be raised by voluntary enlistment, for four years, within the bounds of the regiment to which they belong: provided, that volunteer regiments or companies now organized shall not be affected by this section.<sup>43</sup>

The law also revived the annual regimental muster. Each militia of the line regiment was to hold a muster in either April or May and, according to the act's provisions, every company of the line was expected to muster in April and October. Musters of the volunteer companies were to take place in April, May, and June or in July and October. At these meetings, the men had to remain on duty for not less

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<sup>41</sup>Chambers, "The Militia Crisis," 14.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>An Act To Organize the Militia and provide for the Defence of the Commonwealth Passed March 2, 1858, (Richmond, 1858), 7.

than two hours and not more than one day. In addition to these required musters, the new law called for the officers to meet once a year for a three-day training period conducted by the brigade inspector.<sup>44</sup>

The fear of civil war and the militia legislation of 1858 were influential factors in terminating the public apathy long exhibited toward the military.<sup>45</sup> By the end of 1858, the Virginia populace expressed fresh interest in the state militia. Volunteer officers, in an effort to improve their military skills, attended instructional summer encampments. A feeling of community rivalry often accompanied the intensification of the martial spirit as city militia companies drilled and visited with one another. Such occasions provided popular entertainment during the yearly Fourth of July celebrations.<sup>46</sup>

After the passage of An Act To Organize the Militia and provide for the Defence of the Commonwealth on March 2, 1858, the deterioration of Virginia's militia experienced a slow reversal. Adjutant General Richardson described the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>45</sup>Franklin, The Militant South 1800-1861, 236. For more information on the sectional crisis, see Chambers, "The Militia Crisis," 14.

<sup>46</sup>Chambers, "The Militia Crisis," 14.

effect of the act when he wrote:

The act to organize the militia and provide for the defence of the commonwealth, has operated as effectively, I believe, as any the legislature could have passed, and from the readiness with which it has been generally met by the people, seems to be in accordance with the public sentiment of a large majority of the state.

Of the 185 regiments of the line which existed at the date of the act, 161 have already been organized, and the organization is steadily progressing. . . .<sup>47</sup>

Joining the Adjutant General in praise of the 1858 militia act was Captain George H. Turman and Captain John J. Wood. In a letter to Governor John Letcher written in August, 1861, they vividly described the evolution of the state militia organization in the 1850's, pointing out the destructive nature of the 1853 military law. The soldiers wrote:

The organization under the act of 2nd of March, 1858, under the operations of the Adj't-Gen.'s department was prompt, rapid, and effective beyond expectation, so that on the occurrence of the Jno. Brown raid, the Governor, upon an hour's notice, was able to move from Richmond to the scene of the outrage with 500 fine Troops, and might have commanded five times as many<sup>48</sup> from the other places if they had been needed.

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<sup>47</sup>Report Of The Adjutant General, Year Ending September 30, 1858, (Richmond, 1858), 4.

<sup>48</sup>Letter of Captains George H. Turman and John J. Wood to Governor John Letcher in Calendar Of Virginia State Papers 1836-1869, XI (1893), 188-189.

The promptness with which troops were dispatched to Harper's Ferry did not lessen the shock of Brown's daring attack, for it rocked "Virginia like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky."<sup>49</sup> By disclosing the necessity of military preparedness, the abolitionist's futile efforts heightened public interest in martial activities and supplied the impetus for the construction of a more operative state militia.

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<sup>49</sup>Wise, The End Of An Era, 118.

## CHAPTER II

### THE REVITALIZATION OF VIRGINIA'S MILITIA SYSTEM

The eruption of martial spirit in Virginia after John Brown's raid was both profound and spontaneous. During the month of November and the early days of December of 1859, as a multitude of rumors concerning attempted rescues of Brown permeated the entire state, Virginians became exceedingly alarmed; in fact, the military activity of Virginia approached a level usually known only in wartime.<sup>50</sup> New militia companies sprang up in practically all Virginia counties.<sup>51</sup> In those counties that already possessed some semblance of military organization, a revitalization process occurred.<sup>52</sup> Reporting daily on this flurry of military activity, the newspapers of Virginia expertly employed their editorial influence to perpetuate

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<sup>50</sup> Henry T. Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861, (Richmond, 1934), 95.

<sup>51</sup> Wise, The End Of An Era, 146.

<sup>52</sup> Lee A. Wallace, Jr., "The First Regiment Of Virginia Volunteers," Virginia Cavalcade, XIII (Autumn 1963), 31.

the newly developed mood of belligerency. In an editorial appearing on November 7, 1859, the Richmond Daily Dispatch declared:

The recent events at Harper's Ferry have very much roused the military spirit among us. Our young men are enrolling themselves in the old volunteer companies and forming new ones. In a little time it will become a species of disgrace for any one between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, not to belong to some military organization more perfect than the militia system. This would be a highly commendable spirit under any circumstances; it is particularly so under those which actually exist . . . .

There is only one thing to be feared in the connection with this general uprising of the military, and that is, that it will not last.<sup>53</sup>

What would be the ultimate result if the outburst of military enthusiasm did subside? In the opinion of many Virginia newspaper editors, the consequences would be disastrous for their state and the South. The editors of the Richmond Daily Dispatch warned that the only manner in which the South could be free from war and destruction was through the continuance of the military movement.<sup>54</sup> Echoing similar feelings, the editorial writers of the Lynchburg Daily Virginian informed their readers that the

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<sup>53</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 7, 1859.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., Nov. 22, 1859.

city of Lynchburg, with its large slave population, would have considerable difficulty in suppressing an insurrection or an external attack modeled after John Brown's outrageous example.<sup>55</sup> To insure Virginia's sanctity, the Daily Virginian published a series of editorials appealing to the citizens, mechanics, and young men of Lynchburg to practice patriotism by organizing and joining militia units.<sup>56</sup> Employing the pen name of Curtius, the author of these editorials often played upon the more romantic aspects of military service in an effort to secure recruits. Speaking to the young men of Lynchburg, Curtius made this plea:

If our own citizens will not arm for her [Lynchburg's] defense, to whom are we to look for succor in the time of need? Let us then, once more, see the gay uniform and burished [sic] arms, and hear the "ear-piercing fife" and "the rattling drum" on our streets; and as the lovely fair look down upon you from their windows they will hail you and bless you as their gallant defenders from the horrors which nightly haunt their sleepless couches.<sup>57</sup>

The fears of Curtius and other Virginia editors that the military enthusiasm would subside were without foundation.

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<sup>55</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Oct. 20, 1859.

<sup>56</sup>This series can be found in the Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Oct. 25, 26, and 27, 1859.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., Oct. 27, 1859.



Almost every edition of the Richmond Daily Dispatch for the month of November, 1859, contained announcements describing the progress of rejuvenated or recently established volunteer companies. Articles such as the following were commonplace in the pages of the Daily Dispatch:

A meeting was held in the Circuit Court room last Wednesday night for the purpose of organizing a howitzer corps, Col. August presiding and superintending the election of officers. It appeared that forty-five names--all good men and true--had been enrolled.<sup>58</sup>

The creation of volunteer companies was not confined to the larger cities such as Richmond. A correspondent for the Daily Dispatch reported from Lynchburg that the community had definitely been affected by the military mood. Since Brown's raid, the citizens of Lynchburg had formed three volunteer infantry companies and one cavalry company.<sup>59</sup> It was also announced that Gloucester County possessed three or four military companies while volunteer corps were being organized in eastern Henrico County and Gordonsville.<sup>60</sup> Men from every section of Virginia were hastily answering the call of military duty for the protection of their state.

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<sup>58</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 7, 1859.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., Nov. 24, 1859.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., Nov. 22, Dec. 3, and Dec. 5, 1859.

Military activity was particularly heavy in the Shenandoah Valley as well as in the Tidewater and Piedmont areas. In the northwestern portion of the state, military preparation was not as extensive;<sup>61</sup> nevertheless, the rapid increase in the soldierly spirit of most Virginians was very heartening to the state's newspaper editors. One week after Curtius began his appeals to Lynchburg's populace, the Daily Virginian commented that the city's military vigor was "extraordinarily rife."<sup>62</sup> On November 22, 1859, the editors of the Richmond Daily Dispatch declared:

The rapidity with which new volunteer companies are being organized, and old ones filled up, is honorable to the patriotism and public spirit of Virginia.<sup>63</sup>

On that same day, the Richmond Whig devoted its entire edition to news of military preparation taking place in Virginia counties.<sup>64</sup>

Virginians of all ages and social classes became involved in the military affairs of the state. Young men were

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<sup>61</sup> Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861, 89.

<sup>62</sup> Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 3, 1859.

<sup>63</sup> Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 22, 1859.

<sup>64</sup> Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861, 89.

particularly responsive to the call to arms.<sup>65</sup> In Richmond, the Guard of the Metropolis was revived after the attack on Harper's Ferry. Formerly a corps of boys, the revitalized Guard of the Metropolis was comprised of 'boys of a larger growth'<sup>66</sup> under eighteen years of age and at least five feet five inches tall.<sup>67</sup> Those males over eighteen were similarly infected by the military disease. Students at Washington College<sup>68</sup> in Lexington, "burning with zeal for the honor of the Old Dominion," formed a military company and offered their services to Governor Wise.<sup>69</sup> Five days later it was noted by the Richmond Daily Dispatch that the men of Richmond College had followed the example of the Washington College pupils.<sup>70</sup>

Before the events at Harper's Ferry, the cadets of the Virginia Military Institute were greatly admired by many Virginians. During the John Brown crisis, the citizens

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<sup>65</sup>For information on this subject see editorial entitled "The Military Ardor of Virginia Youth" in Richmond Daily Dispatch, Jan. 5, 1860.

<sup>66</sup>As quoted in Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., Dec. 2, 1859 and Feb. 8, 1860.

<sup>68</sup>Now Washington and Lee.

<sup>69</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 24, 1859.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., Nov. 29, 1859.

continually looked to the youthful cadets as excellent examples of soldierly discipline and military stature. In fact, the Lynchburg Daily Virginian believed that more volunteer recruits could be procured by an ostentatious display of these fine young soldiers.<sup>71</sup> Concurring with the Daily Virginian's evaluation, the editors of the Richmond Daily Dispatch reminded Virginians of the importance of the Institute to the state's defense and suggested that the state legislature increase appropriations to the school.<sup>72</sup>

Many older citizens also volunteered to participate in the military maneuvers. Various groups of senior residents joined together throughout the state for the purpose of providing protection for domestic property. One of the earliest of these groups was established in Richmond. The Daily Dispatch printed the following account of the new company's birth:

The military spirit of our people seems to be thoroughly aroused, and all ages are prepared to resist aggressions and to defend our rights, if needs be, at the point of a bayonet. On Saturday night a new military company, consisting of old and influential citizens, was organized at the Blues' old armory, and are now ready to do police or other duty. The Home Guard, the name given the corps, is a most appropriate one. The members are all well known and reliable and by their organization will be fully able to protect

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<sup>71</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 4, 1859.

<sup>72</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 10, 1859.

the city, in the absence of many of the military companies.<sup>73</sup>

By early December, 1859, the Home Guard contained one hundred and twenty members all over forty-five years of age.<sup>74</sup>

A similar organization was created by the older inhabitants of Church Hill and Union Hill. With the hope of obtaining weapons from the state, these volunteers modelled their company after the Richmond Home Guard.<sup>75</sup> And, following the example of their contemporaries of the Richmond area, the elderly males of both Petersburg and Lynchburg established home guard units.<sup>76</sup>

Designed for domestic defense, the different home guard corps soon received aid from correspondence and vigilance committees, the aim of which was to eliminate suspicious strangers who espoused abolitionist doctrines. In the suburbs and surrounding counties of Richmond, the local citizenry practiced self-appointed law enforcement by engaging in organized reconnaissance expeditions.<sup>77</sup> Other such vigilance committees operated in these counties: Brunswick,

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., Nov. 28, 1859.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., Dec. 1, 1859.

<sup>75</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 3, 1859.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., Dec. 20, 1859 and Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 30, 1859.

<sup>77</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 25, 1859.

Caroline, Clarke, Greenbier, Hanover, King William, Louisa, Nelson, and Spottsylvania. While not forming vigilance committees, the residents of Cabell, Kanawha, and Putnam Counties held mass meetings where resolutions were adopted stating that no abolitionists would be permitted in their counties.<sup>78</sup>

Usually composed of many notable citizens, the various vigilance committees often attempted to discover the true convictions of a neighbor or a strange visitor before asking him to leave the area. For example, the District Two Vigilance Committee of Henrico County held an investigative session on one William H. Gray, a supposed opponent of slavery. Witnesses testified and the proceedings must have resembled a court of law, for Gray was pronounced innocent by the committee.<sup>79</sup> Not everyone, however, received the same fair treatment. Several men arrested by the Richmond area vigilance groups were "ordered to make tracks for a more northern climate."<sup>80</sup> After publicly supporting this decision, the Richmond Daily Dispatch avowed harsh punishment for any

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<sup>78</sup> Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861, 237-238n.

<sup>79</sup> Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 22, 1859. More information on vigilance committees can be found in Ibid., Dec. 7 and Dec. 20, 1859.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Nov. 25, 1859.

whites found fraternizing with Negroes.<sup>81</sup>

Although many Northern observers criticized the extremity of such cautiousness, white Virginians justified these safeguards by noting the numerous threats of armed reprisals for the death of John Brown. Held in Charlestown, Brown's trial began only one week after his capture and, on November 2, 1859, he was sentenced to death by hanging for conspiring to commit murder and treason against the commonwealth of Virginia. Since the execution date was December 2, 1859, the intervening month was one of grave concern for Governor Wise and his fellow Virginians. As rumors of forthcoming rescue missions infiltrated Virginia,<sup>82</sup> the Governor received nearly five hundred letters concerning the fate of John Brown. For the most part, this correspondence either predicted the liberation of Brown or threatened Wise's life if he did not pardon the captives.<sup>83</sup> The following passage is from a letter written to Governor Wise on November 22, 1859, by a native of New York:

I am in possession of certain facts which I have hesitated for some time about communicating to you, but have decided at last to do so.

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., Nov. 19, 1859 and Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 10 and Nov. 19, 1859.

<sup>83</sup>Report Of The Joint Committee On The Harper's Ferry Outrages January 26, 1860, (Richmond, 1860), 7-8.

This much is certain, there is to be a desperate attempt at a rescue of John Brown before the day set apart for his execution. I cannot state all the details nor the exact plan, but this is certain that several prominent and wealthy abolitionists of this city and State, are determined on the attempt.<sup>84</sup>

Such information did nothing to alleviate the fears of nervous Virginians. In response to the prognostications of Brown's rescue, Governor Wise gathered at Charlestown a large military force under the command of Major General William B. Taliaferro. According to the Lynchburg Daily Virginian, the Governor planned to have at least one thousand military men in Charlestown on execution day. Explaining the chief executive's intentions, the newspaper informed Virginia readers that their Governor was convinced an attempt to free Brown would be made.<sup>85</sup>

Other Virginians were equally certain that a movement to extricate Brown was afoot. Mrs. William B. Taliaferro, wife of Major General Taliaferro, wrote in her diary on November 19, 1859, that she had received word "of another attack anticipated at Charlestown."<sup>86</sup> On that same day,

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<sup>84</sup> Anonymous to Governor Henry A. Wise, New York, Nov. 22, 1859, William B. Taliaferro Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

<sup>85</sup> Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 24, 1859.

<sup>86</sup> Diary of Mrs. William B. Taliaferro, Gloucester, Va., Nov. 19, 1859, William B. Taliaferro Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.



the Lynchburg Daily Virginian, expressing thoughts held by most Virginia newspapers, warned the populace of the impending danger. To be sure, the journal declared that "there are thousands of fanatics in the Northern states, who would attempt the rescue of Brown, if there were the smallest show of success."<sup>87</sup>

The chances of a successful rescue were slight, for Governor Wise used every available precaution to insure the court-ordered punishment of John Brown. Endeavoring to reach his goal of one thousand men, the Governor had amassed a total of six hundred and thirty-six military men in Charlestown by November 28, 1859. This force was supplemented by the presence in the near vicinity of approximately seven hundred armed civilians. Later that day, three more military companies and the cadets of the Virginia Military Institute were expected to arrive.<sup>88</sup> The next day the number of troops on duty at Charlestown had increased to one thousand two hundred and fifty-six, an aggregate far greater than originally requested by Governor Wise.<sup>89</sup> And the numerical strength of

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<sup>87</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 19, 1859. For further reports on the belief in rescue plots see Ibid., Nov. 10, 1859 and Richmond Daily Dispatch, Jan. 4 and Jan. 13, 1859.

<sup>88</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 28, 1859.

<sup>89</sup>Report of troops under command of Major General William B. Taliaferro, Charlestown, Va., Nov. 29, 1859, William B. Taliaferro Papers.

this army was continually being enhanced by the arrival of more and more armed citizens.<sup>90</sup>

The troops at Charlestown were heavily armed and fully prepared for any attack. The Richmond Daily Dispatch reported that some of the soldiers were carrying bowie-knives and revolvers as well as their usual weapons. These small arms, in the newspaper's opinion, would be most useful in hand to hand combat.<sup>91</sup> Whatever the style of fighting, the Virginia soldiers would certainly possess firepower superiority, for between November 28 and December 4, 1859, 155 rifles, 162 carbines, 314 muskets, and 163 pistols were issued by ordnance officers.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, heavy field guns were conveniently located and operable.<sup>93</sup>

Before the execution of Brown, Charlestown manifested all the characteristics of a militarily occupied city. A correspondent for the Lynchburg Daily Virginian aptly described the atmosphere when he wrote:

Everything in the shape of business is

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<sup>90</sup>Most Virginia citizens were quite willing to take part in the festivities at Charlestown. An example of this eagerness was reported by the Lynchburg Daily Virginian on Nov. 19, 1859, when residents of Culpeper County agreed to offer their services at Charlestown.

<sup>91</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 28, 1859.

<sup>92</sup>Inventory of Ordnance and Ordnance stores issued at Charlestown, Va., Nov. 28 to Dec. 4, 1859, William B. Taliaferro Papers.

<sup>93</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 28, 1859.

suspended and the inhabitants seem to do nothing but make efforts to provide for the military. Schools are suspended, and schoolhouses occupied as barracks. Churches are, in a manner closed, and the closet must be resorted to by those whose thoughts are directed from things carnal.<sup>94</sup>

While awaiting the execution, the troops were often called from their comfortable accommodations to suppress supposed invasions. Several fires broke out in the area and, as a result, the local populace became more convinced that Brown's liberators were embarking on a campaign of devastation and harrassment. During the night of November 17, a blaze destroyed a farmer's wheat stack on the outskirts of town. Civilians and soldiers answered the alarm and, in the words of the Lynchburg Daily Virginian's reporter, "the wildest terror prevailed" in Charlestown.<sup>95</sup> The most terrifying incident, however, occurred on the night of November 19. That evening, Colonel J. Lucius Davis, commander of all troops stationed in western Virginia until he was replaced after this frightening incident by Major General Taliaferro, sent a telegram to Governor Wise asking for 500 men to stop a

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<sup>94</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 28, 1859.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., Nov. 21, 1859. Allan Keller, author of Thunder At Harper's Ferry, describes the Charlestown population as stricken with terror after a series of fires in the vicinity. Both the Lynchburg Daily Virginian and Keller point to the fact that most people thought these fires were ignited by friends of Brown; nevertheless, the military failed to find a culprit. For more information see Keller, Thunder At Harper's Ferry, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1958), 218-225.

small army advancing from Wheeling.<sup>96</sup> Obviously, the telegram produced instant panic in both Charlestown and Richmond. Over four hundred men in Richmond were quickly gathered and armed. By ten o'clock, a troop train consisting of eight cars left for Charlestown amid the cheers of thousands of well-wishers.<sup>97</sup> The Governor had acted immediately, sending an additional 563 men to Charlestown and replacing Davis with Major General Taliaferro.<sup>98</sup> But Wise's efforts were wasted, for the expected assault did not materialize.

The principal result of the entire incident was the dismissal of Colonel Davis who, without conclusive evidence of an invasion, had requested reinforcements. Nevertheless, Governor Wise, realizing that the military leaders were under great pressure, was not harsh in his condemnation of Davis.<sup>99</sup> Like the Governor, Davis and Taliaferro received many letters predicting the rescue of John Brown and his companions. In one such letter, the informant told Taliaferro that men with supply packages were travelling daily in a mountainous region

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<sup>96</sup> Colonel J. Lucius Davis to Governor Wise, Charlestown, Va., Nov. 19, 1859 as quoted in the Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 21, 1859.

<sup>97</sup> Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 21, 1859.

<sup>98</sup> Message Of The Governor Of Virginia To The Senate and House of Delegates of the Virginia General Assembly, Richmond, Dec. 5, 1859 as quoted in Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 6, 1859.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. In his message, the Governor described Colonel Davis' call for troops as being "very properly and timely made. . . ."

where hidden rockets had recently been uncovered.<sup>100</sup> Another message, intended for Captain Cook, a prisoner and close associate of John Brown, advised the convict to rest peacefully as a party was marching from Pennsylvania to prohibit his execution.<sup>101</sup>

These threats kept Taliaferro and his men on constant alert. Patrols were frequently dispatched to search the encompassing areas for dangerous and suspicious characters.<sup>102</sup> And at regular intervals, Taliaferro reported to Governor Wise on the developments at Charlestown. Writing to the chief executive on November 27, 1859, the Major General saw the previous days as uneventful. The night before, for example, one man had been seen evading a scouting party. Meanwhile, the sentries had thought it necessary to shoot at two unidentified persons. Discounted as insignificant by Taliaferro, these episodes were overshadowed by the fact that "scouts, patrols and videttes report for miles round that

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<sup>100</sup> James Risfing to Major General William B. Taliaferro, Harper's Ferry, Va., n.d., William B. Taliaferro Papers. See also the letter from Captain J. I. Snadenbousch to Major General William B. Taliaferro, Martinsburg, Va., Nov. 30, 1859, William B. Taliaferro Papers.

<sup>101</sup> Anonymous to Captain Cook, Carlisle, Pa., Dec. 1, 1859, William B. Taliaferro Papers.

<sup>102</sup> See letter from Captain J. I. Snadenbousch to Major General William B. Taliaferro, Martinsburg, Va., Nov. 30, 1859, William B. Taliaferro Papers.

perfect quiet prevails."<sup>103</sup>

Despite this apparent tranquillity, Virginia's military efforts remained at an intense level until John Brown's death. Once Brown was executed, the sense of immediacy occupying the thoughts and actions of many Virginians did dissipate.<sup>104</sup> However, Brown's removal did not dispel the fear of future trouble instigated by stubborn abolitionists. In a letter to her cousin dated December 3, 1859, Mrs. Sarah Chaffee Lamb of Norfolk wrote:

I think there is nothing further to fear, I am in hopes it will be a good lesson to those meddlesome Fanatics, as the North they know not what they are about, and all such interferences should be checked at once as has been done in this case.<sup>105</sup>

The fear of more abolitionist atrocities prompted all classes of Virginians to join in the patriotic spirit of militarism. Several observers regarded this fact as a grave

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<sup>103</sup> Major General William B. Taliaferro to Governor Henry Wise, Charlestown, Va., Nov. 27, 1859, William B. Taliaferro Papers.

<sup>104</sup> Henry Shanks, author of The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861, states that people in the Charlestown area were extremely upset until Brown was executed. My findings suggest that while many Virginians did relax after Brown's death, the military surveillance continued. The main reason for this was that Captain John Cook and Edwin Coppac, two notable members of Brown's band, were not killed until December 15. On that day, the Richmond Daily Dispatch announced that a military force equal to the size of the one present for Brown's execution was on duty at Charlestown.

<sup>105</sup> Sarah Chaffee Lamb to Miss Kate Chaffee, Norfolk, Va., Dec. 3, 1859, Lamb Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

indication of the seriousness of the crisis. Prior to Brown's hanging, a Richmond reporter was particularly struck by the name of Roger A. Pryor on the roster of the Petersburg Grays. Serving as a private, Pryor was a newly elected United States Congressman. If men of this high calibre felt impelled to volunteer for military duty, the correspondent declared, then "there must indeed be something ominous in the signs of the times."<sup>106</sup> And indeed there was something rather frightening in the mood of the state's populace. Brown and his cohorts were finally put to death, but all those hungering for revenge seemed yet to be satisfied. With new enlisted men swelling the ranks of the volunteer companies, Virginia remained on martial alert. In reality, Brown's death had little effect on the thinking of most Virginians. Irrational Northerners would strike and when they did the state would be prepared. For all abolitionists contemplating such a venture, the Richmond Daily Dispatch printed this admonition:

It ought to be borne in mind that the military demonstrations at Charlestown were not intended solely to prevent a rescue, but to prepare and accustom the volunteers of Virginia for defensive operations against a more formidable foe than JOHN BROWN.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 21, 1859. Both John S. Wise, the Governor's son, and Henry Shanks state that Brown's raid caused much Southern distrust of the North, the end result of which was an almost incurable breach. See Wise, The End Of An Era, 135 and Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861, 85.

<sup>107</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 23, 1859.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE MOVE FOR MILITARY SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The military fervor created by John Brown's raid and execution did not die with time. As the year 1860 came and began to pass, most Virginians were still shocked by the outrageous event. This feeling was not wholly propagated by the rhetoric of politicians or the emotional pleas of the state's newspapers, for the fear produced by Brown's attack and the endorsement his actions received from many Northerners provided impetus enough for Virginia's citizens.<sup>108</sup>

Although imbued with this patriotic spirit, numerous residents found it terribly difficult to participate in military activities because of their financial situation. To those Virginians who were not members of the upper economic classes, joining a volunteer company represented a definite pecuniary burden. Writing for the Lynchburg Daily Virginian, the anonymous author Curtius acknowledged the monetary hardships the city's mechanics would encounter if they organized an armed company. Curtius wrote:

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<sup>108</sup>Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861, 89.



The writer well understands your circumstances. That, compelled to labor for the support of yourselves and families every day, nay, every hour lost from that labor for the purpose of drill or parade, is so much time lost to you, and consequently an equivalent in money out of your pockets.<sup>109</sup>

But Curtius asked the mechanics to make the financial sacrifices with the belief that the more affluent citizens of Lynchburg, realizing the urgent need for an artillery company, would contribute to the organization. Hopefully, Curtius thought that the city council might pay the mechanic's daily wages when they were serving the city in a military capacity.<sup>110</sup>

Similar concern over financing the volunteer companies was evident throughout Virginia. In Lynchburg, Norfolk, and Richmond, for example, merchants were often hesitant to allow their young employees time off for drills with their various companies. If the merchant permitted such vacations, he felt his business would suffer. And, in several cases, these merchants were men who disapproved of the martial movement.<sup>111</sup> One Norfolk employer, according to the Richmond Daily Dispatch, fired a helper for going with his company to Harper's Ferry and thereby missing work. To the newspaper's knowledge,

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<sup>109</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Oct. 26, 1859.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., Oct. 27, 1859.

however, this was the only case of an employee losing his job while protecting his land.<sup>112</sup>

Including the purchase of a proper uniform and weapons, the cost of membership in a volunteer corps was often too great for the young workers, many of whom earned low wages. For them, the choice between forfeiting needed hours of work and donating time to military activities was a most difficult one; nevertheless, those who willingly made the sacrifice to serve were sometimes rewarded by a grateful community. Because many of the volunteers could "ill afford the expense attendant upon active membership," Lynchburg's military proponents urged appreciative citizens to contribute to the patriotic organizations.<sup>113</sup> Generous residents of Petersburg did just that, collecting \$1,278.50 for their soldiers on duty at Charlestown.<sup>114</sup>

Not all of those Virginians who were serving their state were as fortunate as the Petersburg volunteers. Unlike the Petersburg populace, the Virginia General Assembly was not as eager to proffer recompense to the volunteer troops. Late in January, 1860, a large number of these men complained publicly that they had received no payment for the working hours

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<sup>112</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 24, 1859.

<sup>113</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Oct. 26, 1859.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., Dec. 30, 1859.

missed during their military duty.<sup>115</sup> Responding quickly to this public outcry, the state legislators passed a joint resolution calling for financial compensation for the soldiers.<sup>116</sup>

The General Assembly's delay in paying the volunteers was due more to a lack of funds than a lack of desire. After the passage of the joint resolution, the Richmond Daily Dispatch lauded the governmental officials for their benevolence:

The action of the Legislature with regard to the volunteers called into service during the late disturbances on our frontier, is worthy of all praise. It has been not less wise than it was prompt and timely. No economy is so bad as that which stints the public service in affairs of the last moment to the State. Nothing encourages the public servant so much as the knowledge that his services will be appreciated by his country. Especially is this true with those called upon to serve in a military capacity. A State so liberal and so capable of appreciating the services of his sons as Virginia, will never want defenders.<sup>117</sup>

Whatever the effect of the legislature's charitable deed, the fact remained that John Brown's raid had elicited heavy state expenditures. The entire cost of the Harper's Ferry raid and the proceedings at Charlestown was estimated to be

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<sup>115</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Jan. 20, 1860.

<sup>116</sup>For details on the exact amount appropriated to the volunteers and their companies see the Lynchburg Daily Virginian, March 2, 1860 and the Richmond Daily Dispatch, Feb. 8, 28, and 29, 1860.

<sup>117</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Feb. 11, 1860.

between \$240,000.00 and \$260,000.00.<sup>118</sup> A board of military commissioners was appointed to insure a correct audit of all the expenses and those individuals and businesses to whom money was due were requested to make their claims to the commissioners. Despite an initial appropriation of \$150,000.00, the board was unable to balance the accounts. In their first statement, they reported that \$185,667.03 had been audited. To liquidate all debts, however, the commissioners believed they needed another \$75,000.00. Immediately following this announcement, some Virginians openly challenged the necessity of such a large supplemental appropriation. Pointing to the alibi of a panic, State Senator Alexander and the Lynchburg Daily Virginian accused administrative bureaucrats of unwisely spending public money.<sup>119</sup> This indictment received little public support and, on March 6, 1860, the General Assembly approved the additional appropriation.<sup>120</sup>

Other Virginians were displeased with the military

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1860 and Lynchburg Daily Virginian, March 2, 1860.

<sup>119</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, March 2, 1860. In this article, the entire cost of the Harper's Ferry and Charlestown events are itemized.

<sup>120</sup>"An Act making an additional Appropriation to defray the Expenses incurred for the Defence of the Commonwealth Passed March 6, 1860" in Acts Of The General Assembly Of The State Of Virginia Passed in 1859-60, In The Eighty-Fourth Year Of The Commonwealth, (Richmond, 1860), 129.

movement for moral rather than financial reasons. This group, comprised mainly of mothers, equated military service with moral depravity. Fearing that their sons might be exposed to the dual vices of alcohol and obscenity, they discouraged enlistments. Realizing the dangers of such beliefs, military officers moved to quell maternal fears. Strict regulations prohibiting drinking and swearing were quickly incorporated into the bylaws of volunteer companies. A section of Richmond's Company B's rules read as follows:

No member of the company, while on duty or in uniform, shall enter any barroom or drinking saloon, or make use of any profane or obscene language. Intoxication while on duty or in uniform, wilful and repeated disobedience of orders, habitual violation of any article or section of the constitution and bylaws and dishonorable conduct, shall be punished by expulsion from the company. The names of all persons expelled from the company shall be communicated to all other military companies in the city.<sup>121</sup>

The stringency of these regulations and the obvious embarrassment which would result from a dishonorable discharge mitigated the suspicions of many a concerned mother.

Neither the high cost of maintaining military units nor the moral objections voiced by some citizens substantially affected the spread of the martial spirit. On December 14, 1859, the Lynchburg Daily Virginian noted that the state's newspapers were publishing daily announcements of the forma-

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<sup>121</sup>As quoted in the Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 21, 1859. Also see Ibid., Nov. 13, 1859 and Dec. 3, 1859.

tion of new volunteer companies.<sup>122</sup> One month later the Richmond Daily Dispatch printed this progress report:

The Army Of Virginia.--There are already in the county of Augusta no less than nine volunteer companies, fully equipped and organized; and five other companies are being organized. In Fauquier there are three companies of cavalry, two of which were on duty at Charlestown. The county of Albemarle has three companies of infantry and one troop of horses. In Spotsylvania there are two rifle companies, one of artillery and a troop of horses.<sup>123</sup>

The rapid rate at which these volunteer corps were established illustrated the intensity of the sectional dispute. Virginians, as did many Southerners, believed that their future security rested on their military strength. But to be militarily prepared, the state needed weapons. Since Brown's death, the demand for arms had far exceeded the supply. In early December, 1859, John Tyler, a former President of the United States, told his son that the state was "arming to the teeth--more than fifty thousand stand of arms, already distributed, and the demand for more daily increasing."<sup>124</sup>

The government's efforts to fulfill this demand were hampered from the outset by several problems. In the first place, many of the guns owned by Virginia were in poor con-

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<sup>122</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Dec. 4, 1859. See also the Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 21, 1859.

<sup>123</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Jan. 14, 1860.

<sup>124</sup>John Tyler to Robert Tyler, Sherwood Forest, Va., Dec. 6, 1859, in Lyon G. Tyler, The Letters And Times Of The Tylers, (Richmond, 1885), II, 555.

dition. According to one newspaper reporter, the state's arsenals contained large numbers of flint muskets, but these weapons were, in his opinion, "little better than fence rails, and should be thrown out of use in Virginia as speedily as possible."<sup>125</sup> Complicating this situation was the fact that those firearms in serviceable condition had been, in many cases, carried off by militiamen and volunteers. The rapid disintegration of the militia system in the 1850's caused much of this noticeable decrease in the supply of weapons. After the dissolution of their companies, members often failed to return their guns to the proper authorities. Newspaper announcements urging the men to honor their commitment and bring back the arms issued to them went unanswered.<sup>126</sup> But this failure to return munitions was not unique to the soldiers of the early 1850's, for some men who served at Harper's Ferry rewarded themselves by pilfering a musket or a rifle. And the State Armory at Richmond experienced difficulty in retrieving muskets issued to citizens during the panic. The Governor made three requests for these muskets without any apparent response.<sup>127</sup>

In an effort to replenish the arms supply, Governor

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<sup>125</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 3, 1859.

<sup>126</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Jan. 24, 1860.

<sup>127</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, March 5, 1860.

Wise and the General Assembly allotted large sums of money for the purchase of weapons. By December 16, 1859, the Governor had already expended \$35,500.00 on firearms.<sup>128</sup> Virginia's legislature adamantly supported his actions and, on December 13, 1859, a bill asking for a munitions appropriation of \$100,000.00 was presented in the House of Delegates.<sup>129</sup> The members of the House approved the bill in modified form "by an almost unanimous vote"<sup>130</sup> and the State Senate promptly concurred. In its final version, "An Act making an Appropriation for the purchase and manufacture of Arms and Munitions of War" authorized the Governor to appoint a commission empowered with the right to purchase munitions for the state at a cost not exceeding \$180,000.00.<sup>131</sup>

The General Assembly also arranged for the manufacture of arms in Virginia by passing an armory bill. This act appropriated \$500,000.00 for the production of weapons and the construction of a state armory.<sup>132</sup> While understanding the need to procure armaments, some Virginians thought the

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<sup>128</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Dec. 20, 1859.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., Dec. 17, 1859.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., Jan. 13, 1860.

<sup>131</sup>"An Act making an Appropriation for the purchase and manufacture of Arms and Munitions of War Passed Jan. 21, 1860" in Acts Of The General Assembly Of The State Of Virginia Passed in 1859-60, 127.

<sup>132</sup>See Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Jan. 14 and 26, 1860.



legislators were much too generous. Once again, public concern over the cost of the military movement endangered its existence. One dissident citizen wrote:

With regard to the propriety of putting the State upon a proper military footing, by the organization of military companies, and the purchase of additional arms, there was but one opinion; but we take it upon ourselves to say, with all the lights now before us, that there was no necessity for the passage of the mammoth bill which has just become a law. We say more; that the people of the State, in less than five years, will condemn the conduct of the men, who, under the influence of a panic, have, at a single clip, increased their taxes thirty thousand dollars per annum--that being the interest upon the half million appropriated in the Armory Bill.<sup>133</sup>

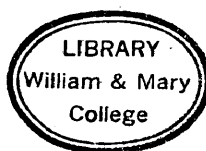
Discontented Virginians were not the only people to criticize the extravagance of the General Assembly. Northerners ridiculed the entire rearmament crusade and, in several instances, asked against whom the arms were to be used. In reply, the editors of the Richmond Daily Dispatch declared that the weapons would be employed "against the JOHN BROWN'S of the free States, in pure self-defence, and with no purpose of aggression. . . ." <sup>134</sup>

Despite domestic castigation of Virginia's militarism, Northern munitions manufacturers did not hesitate to sell

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<sup>133</sup> Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 15, 1859.

<sup>134</sup> Editorial in the Boston Journal as quoted in the Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 16, 1859.



their products to the state. Early in December, 1859, the Boston Journal stated that Governor Wise had bought \$26,000.00 worth of Sharp's rifles and revolvers from that Hartford, Connecticut firm.<sup>135</sup> The Governor also contacted the Northern based Colt Firearm Manufacturing Company, buying pistols, rifles, and carbines from them while working with W.M.B. Hartley, the secretary of the business, on a plan to construct an armory in Richmond.<sup>136</sup> A later report in the Richmond Daily Dispatch disclosed that final arrangements for building the armory had been made by Hartley and Governor Wise. The proposal called for one million dollars in capital, half of which was to be provided by the Colt Company.<sup>137</sup>

The completion of the armory plans seemed to encourage more business between Virginia and the North. In January, 1860, a salesman of Sharp's muskets and rifles was in Richmond displaying his goods and attempting to sell them to state authorities.<sup>138</sup> Meanwhile, the commissioners appointed by the Governor to purchase weapons were busy compiling information on different brands of guns. They stayed one week in Washington reviewing such material with officers of both

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<sup>135</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 19, 1859.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., Dec. 31, 1859.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., Jan. 13, 1860.

the United States Army and Navy.<sup>139</sup> During this period of rearmament, however, both Northern capitalists and Virginia's governmental representatives were labelled hypocrites by their contemporaries. To many Northerners, it was conceivable that the weapons sold to Virginia would eventually be used against themselves. On the other hand, Virginia authorities were betraying the popular cause of commercial separation from the North. After Brown's nefarious raid, the state's newspapers adamantly pleaded for the abrogation of trade with the Northern manufacturers. The editors of the Lynchburg Daily Virginian advocated such a divorce when they wrote:

The Harper's Ferry invasion may constitute an additional reason why we should be as far as possible independent of our Northern "brethren"-- but beyond and superior to all that, is the fact that it is, abstractly, a shame and a reproach upon the Southern States of this Union that they should unnecessarily pay millions and tens of millions of dollars every year to Northern factors and agents, for conducting an export trade that we of the South could just as easily conduct for ourselves.<sup>140</sup>

Expressing similar thoughts, the Richmond Daily Dispatch petitioned residents of Virginia and the South to seek revenge through commercial interdiction:

The people of the South, if they wish to retaliate upon the abolitionists of the

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., Feb. 24, 1860.

<sup>140</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Dec. 2, 1859.

North in a way to be felt, give up the use of all their manufactures, and rely upon their own resources to supply their necessities.<sup>141</sup>

As the drive for non-intercourse gained momentum, public meetings were held in its support. In December, 1859, the citizens of Appomattox, Franklin, and Washington counties participated in such meetings. The format for these gatherings was analogous in that resolutions were adopted denouncing John Brown and his sympathizers and endorsing Virginia's military mobilization and domestic manufactures.<sup>142</sup> Eventually, the crusade became associated with Virginia patriotism:

If the impulse of patriotism does not prompt our volunteers to use Virginia manufactures for uniforms, let them be compelled to do it by law. To arm ourselves against Northern aggression, and at the same time pour money into the pockets of the North, when there is no necessity for it, is an inconsistency of which Virginia should be ashamed.<sup>143</sup>

To be sure, every Virginian was asked to encourage and support Southern industrial independence. Shortly after John Brown's execution, the Richmond Daily Dispatch proclaimed:

Let us have volunteer companies everywhere, and everywhere associations pledged to support the industry of the

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<sup>141</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Feb. 4, 1860.

<sup>142</sup>See the Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Dec. 13, 14 and 17, 1859. On Dec. 21, 1859, the Richmond Daily Dispatch also published a list of such meetings recently held.

<sup>143</sup>Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Dec. 13, 1859.

South.<sup>144</sup>

The advocates of commercial non-intercourse were particularly vehement on the desirability of not buying military goods, specifically uniforms, from Northern manufacturers. On almost a daily basis, articles expounding upon the virtues of "homespun" outfits appeared in print.<sup>145</sup> By adopting a uniform made in Virginia and of Virginia material, the volunteer companies would "show that they really intend to do something for Virginia independence."<sup>146</sup> Moreover, because these domestically produced uniforms would be cheaper than Northern counterparts, those men who had previously been unable to afford to enlist could now do so. With no financial barriers to exclude a member of society, the state's military movement could easily become a common cause.<sup>147</sup>

The obvious popularity of the non-intercourse cause did increase the demand for homemade products; in fact, the Daily Dispatch was amazed and yet pleased with the many new plans for Southern industries.<sup>148</sup> During the first months

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<sup>144</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 14, 1859. See Ibid., Dec. 24 and 30, 1859 and Feb. 3, 1860.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., Nov. 25, 29 and 30 and Dec. 1, 2, 5 and 14, 1859. For more information see Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Dec. 8 and 12, 1859 and Jan. 24, 1860.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., Dec. 2, 1859. See also Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Dec. 5, 1859 and Jan. 24, 1860.

<sup>147</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 23, 30 and Dec. 1 and 5, 1859.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., Feb. 17, 1860.

of 1860, as commercial autonomy became equated with patriotism, Southern independence, and revenge against Northern fanatics, it was evident to most citizens that more than just military uniforms could be produced in Virginia. Facilities were planned for manufacturing furniture, umbrellas, shoes, boots, hats, stoves, clothing, brooms, steam fire engines, iron and brass castings, and many other products.<sup>149</sup> When finally completed and in operation, these proposed factories would enable Virginia and the South to dissolve their colonial relationship with the North.

The proponents of commercial non-intercourse knew that an absolute abrogation of trade with the Yankees would be most difficult to achieve. Undoubtedly, it would require months and perhaps years to construct the physical facilities for such production.<sup>150</sup> In the meantime, Virginia, by mobilizing its military forces, had created an immediate need for munitions. To assure present protection, the cause of industrial independence was disregarded and arms were procured from the North, for Virginians were "quite willing to purchase abolition guns to kill abolitionists with, until we can manufacture the same article for ourselves."<sup>151</sup> Ultimately,

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<sup>149</sup> Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 20, 1859.

<sup>150</sup> See Ibid., Dec. 16, 20, and 30, 1859.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., Dec. 16, 1859.

the state would be capable of replenishing its own arms supply and, at that time, the non-intercourse pledge would be honored. Until then, however, Virginians would continue to deal with Northern salesmen because "it is at all events not as disgraceful as their selling them for the purpose of killing their own relatives and friends!"<sup>152</sup>

Virginia was striving for military self-sufficiency, and commercial independence was an integral part of this movement. The legislative joint committee appointed to investigate the events at Harper's Ferry suggested that the state proceed with the military revitalization program and promote domestic industries.<sup>153</sup> But to do so, some citizens thought that the state's railroad system should be repaired and completed since this step "is one of the most obvious requirements of public security as well as prosperity."<sup>154</sup> During the Harper's Ferry crisis, the value of an efficient railroad network was evident to most intelligent Virginians. Without the rapid transportation of both men and supplies, John Brown's attempt to incite a slave rebellion might have succeeded; therefore, because of the threat of more attacks,

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<sup>152</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 16, 1859.

<sup>153</sup>Report Of The Joint Committee On The Harper's Ferry Outrages January 26, 1860, 35.

<sup>154</sup>Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 7, 1859.

many Virginians believed that the governmental authorities should extend the railroad system so that all areas of the state would be easily and quickly accessible. The editors of the Richmond Daily Dispatch wrote:

One of the most important lessons taught by the late invasion of Harper's Ferry, is the fact that, in twenty-four hours, troops can be congregated from a distance of 150 or 200 miles; at a moment's notice, cannon and military stores transported, and an invasion crushed and its leaders shot or captured.<sup>155</sup>

Furthermore, Virginia residents argued that improved rail-ways would be commercially advantageous. By connecting the eastern and western portions of the state, railroads would foster internal business, enhance commercial ties with the expanding American West, and weaken the Northern trade monopoly.<sup>156</sup> The state legislature, fully aware of these benefits and of the favorable public sentiment, enacted legislation to aid the construction of the Covington and Ohio Railroad. This bill, passed on February 29, 1860, set aside two and one half million dollars for completion of the western route.<sup>157</sup>

The people of Virginia gratefully accepted the General

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., Oct. 28, 1859.

<sup>156</sup>See Ibid., Oct. 28, Nov. 7, Dec. 2, and Dec. 21, 1859 and Feb. 1 and Feb. 19, 1860.

<sup>157</sup>An Act to provide for the construction and equipment of the Covington and Ohio railroad passed February 29, 1860, (Richmond, 1860), 125.



Assembly's action, but many Virginians believed that their elected representatives were obligated to do more for the state's protection. Before the opening session of the General Assembly in 1859, its members were frequently reminded of their responsibility "to put the Commonwealth of Virginia in an attitude of defence."<sup>158</sup> Addressing the legislature for his final time, Governor Wise recommended better organization of the state's military force so that future disasters could be averted.<sup>159</sup> John Letcher, Wise's successor, spoke similar words in his inaugural message:

Whether the Union shall survive or perish, it is nevertheless, your duty to place the State in such a condition that she will be prepared at all times and upon the shortest notice, to protect her honor, defend her rights, and maintain her institutions against all assaults of her enemies. With this view, I recommend a careful revision of the militia laws; and in this connection I suggest that munitions of war be procured and provision made for the organization of an efficient military staff.<sup>160</sup>

Therefore, the major task of the legislators, in the opinion of Virginia's chief leaders and citizenry, was to update the militia laws to insure maximum military preparation.

The members of the state legislature did receive advice

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<sup>158</sup> Lynchburg Daily Virginian, Nov. 28, 1859. See also Richmond Daily Dispatch, Nov. 15 and Dec. 19, 1859.

<sup>159</sup> Message Of The Governor Of Virginia, Dec. 5, 1859 as quoted in Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 6, 1859.

<sup>160</sup> Message from Governor Letcher to General Assembly of Virginia on January 7, 1860 as quoted in Richmond Daily Dispatch, Jan. 9, 1860.

in this project, for a military convention of Virginia's commissioned officers was held in Richmond solely for the purpose of discussing the most effective means of strengthening the militia.<sup>161</sup> Resolving not to alter the existing statutes but merely improve upon their "radical defects," the convention assigned a committee headed by Major General Taliaferro to communicate their ideas to the legislature.<sup>162</sup> In response to the public's desires and the recommendations of both governmental and military leaders, the General Assembly revised Virginia's military laws. On March 30, 1860, An Act For The Better Organization Of The Militia was approved by the elected representatives. This law strengthened the state's militia organization and contained provisions specifically designed for a crisis period. Previously, officers had been required to meet once a year for a three day training session. According to the new statute, "all the officers of each county" were compelled to attend two such annual training camps.<sup>163</sup> And the number of musters for volunteer companies was increased from four to six a year.<sup>164</sup> During the Harper's

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<sup>161</sup> See Richmond Daily Dispatch, Dec. 21, 1859 and Jan. 10, 11, 12 and 14, 1860.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., Jan. 14, 1860.

<sup>163</sup> An Act For The Better Organization Of The Militia Of The Commonwealth Passed March 30, 1860, (Richmond, 1860), 7.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

Ferry affair and the days preceding Brown's execution, the state lacked useable weapons. In an effort to remedy this problem, the legislators incorporated into the 1860 act a clause calling for an inspection of all firearms possessed by the militiamen who were participating in the spring musters. In addition to this clause, the act set forth guidelines for the replacement of faulty firearms:

Improved and efficient arms shall be issued to all volunteer companies as soon as the same can be obtained. As soon as may be, the governor shall require every company having in its possession arms or accoutrements, cannon or equipments, which are inferior, unfit for service, or not suitable to the description of force to which such company belongs, or which may be repaired or improved at the public armory, to exchange the same; and when returned to such arsenal as he may direct, he shall cause to be issued to such company the requisite number and description of arms and accoutrements, or cannon or equipments of the most improved and efficient character.<sup>165</sup>

To facilitate the collection of issued arms, the militia law ruled that any person who could not produce the weapon assigned to him would be prosecuted on a charge of larceny.<sup>166</sup> Finally, the General Assembly included this provision to insure prompt protection in the future:

In case of any invasion or insurrection within the limits of any division, brigade, regiment, battalion or company, it shall be the duty of the commandant of such division, brigade, regiment, battalion or company to

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<sup>165</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 15.

order out, for the defence of the state, the militia, or any part thereof, under his command, and immediately report what he has done, to his immediate commanding officer, by whom such information shall be transmitted with the utmost expedition, to the commander in chief.<sup>167</sup>

With the passage of the 1860 military reorganization act, the Virginia Legislature of 1859-1860 completed its work on the defensive preparations of the state. The legislature's session had been a productive one with appropriations made for internal railroad improvements and the procurement of weapons in addition to passage of the popular militia law. And even if there were no more invasions, most Virginia residents realized that Brown's raid had merely been the harbinger of more and greater assaults on the institution of slavery. By the end of the year 1860 Virginians were no longer hysterically nervous over Brown's attack but yet neither were they willing to dissolve the military units which had arisen because of that distasteful event. The militia reorganization process, beginning in 1853 and receiving its greatest impetus from John Brown's raid, was now finished and, in the opinion of Captains George H. Turman and John J. Wood, enabled Virginia to be "far better prepared for the war than any other State."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>168</sup> Captain George H. Turman and Captain John J. Wood to Governor John Letcher in Calendar Of Virginia State Papers 1836-1869, XI, 1893, 188-189.

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