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Blending Loyalties: Maine Soldiers Respond to The Civil War

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ANDY DeROCHE

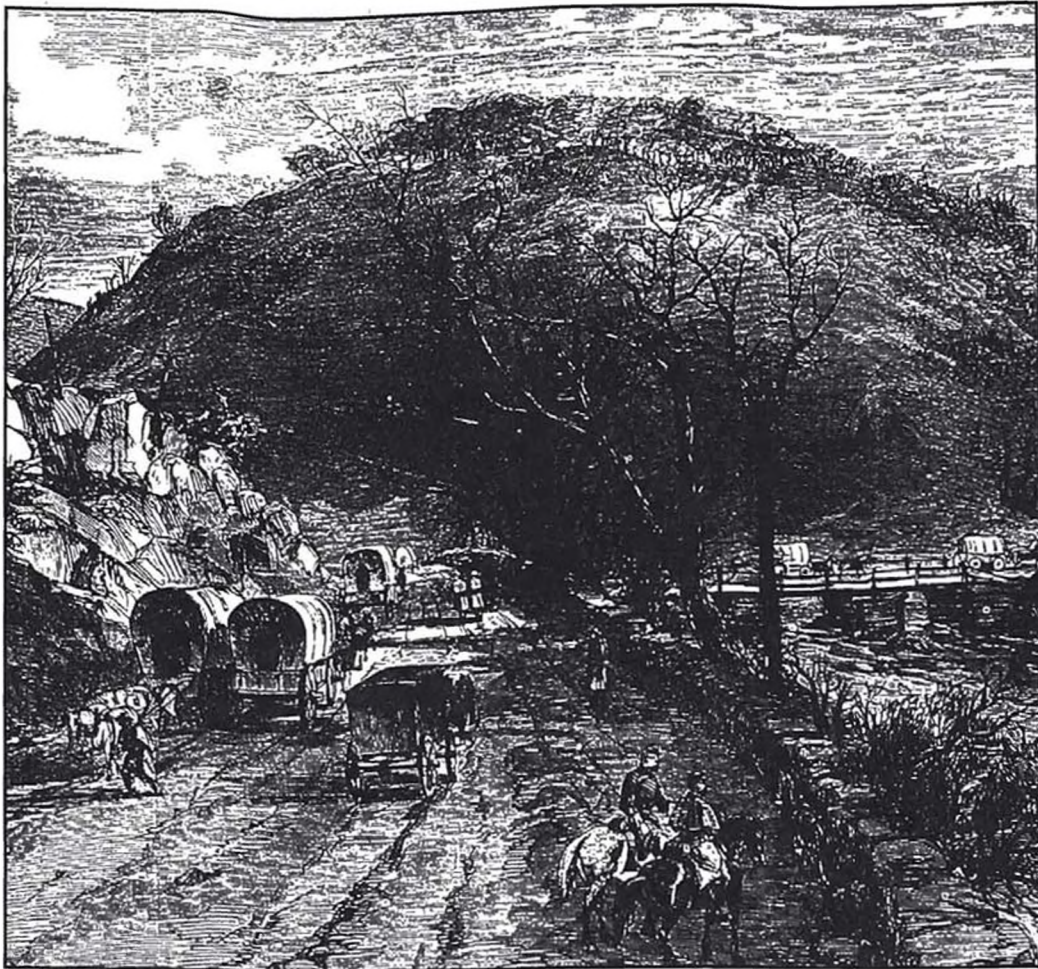
“Say a prayer for the common foot soldier,
Spare a thought for his back-breaking work.
Say a prayer for his wife and his children,
Who burn the fires and who still till the earth.”

-The Rolling Stones, *Salt of the Earth*

BLENDING LOYALTIES MAINE SOLDIERS RESPOND TO THE CIVIL WAR¹

Scholars agree that during the Civil War most Federal soldiers saw their primary purpose as saving the Union, but their loyalty to the Union was expressed in complex ways. Using a sample of thirty-seven collections of Civil War correspondence and diaries, Andy DeRoche assesses the soldiers' view of the war, the Union, the Conscription Act, and the elections of 1864. Above all, loyalty to family structured their thinking about these momentous national questions.

As a number of recently published regimental histories make clear, the state of Maine contributed impressively to the northern cause during the Civil War. Over 70,000 Mainers served during the war, representing more than 60 percent of the eligible military population – the highest figure for any northern state.² We know a great deal about the common Maine soldiers' accomplishments on the battlefield – their victories and their defeats – but their views on the meaning of the war are seldom brought under scrutiny. What made these Mainers enlist in such impressive numbers? Were their views unique?



Over 70,000 Mainers joined the Union cause during the Civil War, following the powerful pull of Unionist sentiment. As the soldiers pushed south into Confederate territory, they groped for ways to reconcile their loyalty to Union and their loyalty to family.

Clues about these attitudes can be gleaned from a representative survey of Civil War letters and diaries, which express views on important Civil War issues in the common soldier's own words. The sample selected for this article does not include famous Mainers like Joshua Chamberlain; instead, it surveys the attitudes of thirty-seven common soldiers from across the state. Admittedly, this represents only a small percentage of Maine's Civil War contingent. Yet it is drawn from a broad geographical area – from thirty different Maine towns ranging from Kittery to Eastport, and from Macwahoc Plantation to Bethel, with many

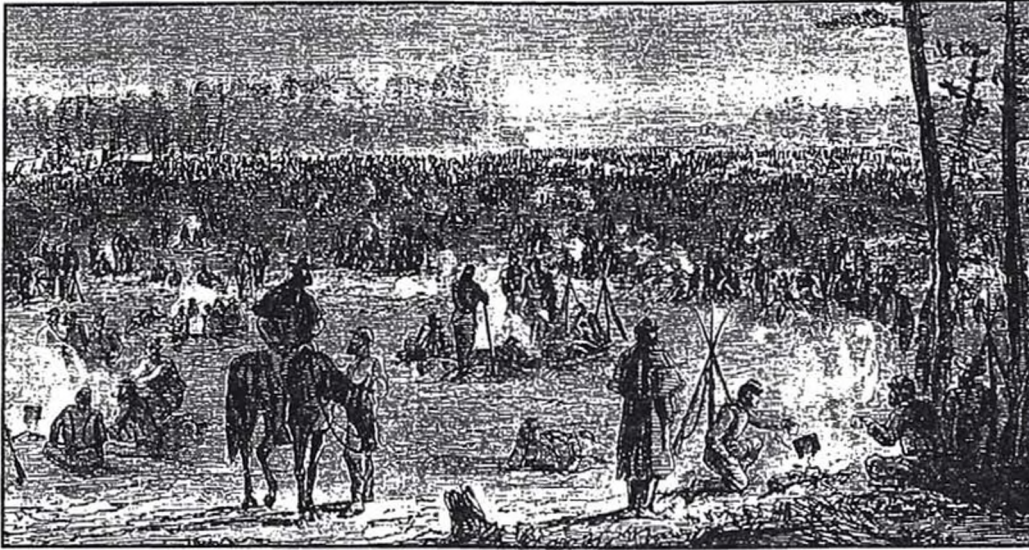
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more in between. The thirty-seven men who left these letters and diaries served in eighteen different regiments. Patterns in their attitudes thus cannot be attributed to similarity in origins or interaction as a single fighting unit. These thirty-seven common soldiers represent a broad spectrum of reactions to the Civil War experience.

Scholars agree that the vast majority of northern soldiers fought primarily to save the Union, and the letters and diaries of Maine's soldiers confirm this impression.³ But their loyalty to the Union was expressed in complex ways, and shaped by a competing set of loyalties to family and home. Important to their decision to enlist was the knowledge that their families were secure in their absence. Family loyalty operated in tandem with loyalty to country to influence the soldiers' view of the war. For some, the loss of brothers or fathers in the war inspired them to fight on, giving meaning to their family's sacrifice. For others, these loyalties brought tensions: Volunteering or reenlisting forced them to choose between protecting their country and protecting their family. Family needs sometimes compelled soldiers to limit their time of service, either by joining nine-month regiments or by refusing to reenlist. Ultimately, Mainers compromised their loyalty to country with their loyalty to family – an ideological mix that inspired the northern victory.

While Maine's soldiers remained steadfast in their support for the Union, they often criticized the methods employed to save it. The battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862 was a low point in the Union cause, and many soldiers strongly criticized this disaster. However, 1863 brought several important new policies, among the most crucial being a call for conscription.⁴ Maine soldiers strongly favored conscription as a means to save the Union. Their attitudes about the draft tell us much about their loyalty to country, but they also reveal some important insights into their loyalty to family.

Maine soldiers advocated drafting men who refused to do their fair share, but they felt that each family's contribution should be limited – a soldier's brother should be exempt from conscription, for example. Carmel native Peleg Bradford of the



Union soldiers welcomed the Conscription Act – which would compel those who avoided the war to do their part – but they also needed reassurance that their own families would not be impoverished by conscription.
HARPER'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE (1864).

1st Maine Heavy Artillery found the war meaningless, but he realized that his objections mattered little, and he expected the war to last for several years after 1863. If the fighting were to continue, he felt that every man should do his part: Those who would not volunteer should be drafted. The thought of young men lazing around Carmel, while he suffered, angered him. As he explained to his mother: “I hope that they will have to draft in Carmel, so to get some of them scamps out here.” His wish came true in March 1863, when the Enrollment Act allowed conscription. Shortly after this policy was announced he inquired: “How do they like the draft in Carmel? Did it frighten any of them?” Carmel’s slackers had “hung back about long enough.”⁵

In Bradford’s mind, however, “every man” did not include his brothers. He concurred with the majority of soldiers in this study in urging relatives not to enlist – and hoping they would not

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be drafted. One sacrifice for each family, in their minds, was enough. Bradford pleaded with his three brothers not to join the army or navy, and to his mother he wrote: "You tell father for God sake not to let Owen come out here for he is too young." Bradford feared for his brothers' safety, but he also understood the financial drawbacks of military service. "I should advise you to stay at home & let the war and sea go to hell, for there is plaises that a man can make more than to go to sea or war eather." In spite of Peleg's warnings, all three brothers enlisted.⁶

Bradford fervently wished for an end to the war, but if it were to continue, he wanted every northern family to do its part. The 5th Maine's William Adams, a farmer from the small town of Webbs Mills, expressed similar sentiments. In 1863 he wrote to his sister: "What do the people think of the Conscription Act. I am glad. It is going to take some of the fellows out." He welcomed the arrival of these "fellows" from home to help the cause, but then he added that he hoped his father was old enough to be exempt. Like Bradford, he thought that only so much should be expected of a family.⁷ John Sheahan, a Dennysville teacher in the 1st Maine Cavalry, supported the northern cause but did not think every son from a family should serve. He, too, urged his parents not to let his brothers enlist. "Don't let Ned enlist; two is enough for one father to send. Don't let him go; now you mind what I tell you."⁸

The Perry family of South Thomaston supplied four soldiers to the northern effort – Chandler Perry and three of his sons. In May 1863 one of the sons, Levi, wrote in favor of the draft: "the Conscription act is to be put in force....I would like to see the men in the field." He particularly wished that certain people in his home town of South Thomaston would be forced to do their part, explaining to his sister: "I hope Jerry Sleeper will come here and a few more of the boys around there; they have laid back at home long enough." As for his family, however, he urged his youngest brother and his brother-in-law to stay home.⁹

Dan Brown of Baldwin was pleased that the draft would force those critical of the war to do their part: "The draft took some of the copper heads; Bully for that." But he, too, desired

that his relatives be spared. Upon hearing that his brother had been drafted, Brown wrote: "You must not come for mother cannot get along without you at home."¹⁰ He and many others welcomed more troops to win the war and applauded the sense of equity the draft promised, but he, like others, thought each family's contribution should be limited.

These letters make it clear that Maine soldiers felt two sets of loyalties – to country and family. Every man had a duty to his country, and those who shirked deserved to be drafted. But every man also had a duty to family. Preserving the Union would benefit families, but not if they were impoverished by sending sons and fathers to war. The Maine soldiers responded to this dilemma by advocating that each family supply only one or two soldiers and retain a similar number of males at home to help mothers and sisters keep the family intact. Dan Brown's advice – "you must not come for mother cannot get along without you at home" – echoes the strains caused by addressing these two sets of loyalties. Mainers favored the draft, but they generally hoped that their relatives would be exempt.¹¹

Family Influences

By the end of 1863, Levi Perry's father and one of his brothers had died in the struggle. Evidently his mother urged him to remain in the army and help guarantee that they had not died in vain. Perry promised her his best effort. "Two years of fighting has not lessened my love for my Country one mite so don't have any fear but I will be true....For you dear mother I would not leave the Army until the South was humbled."¹² Levi kept his promise to continue the cause for which his father and brother had died. He reenlisted for the duration of the war.

The \$100 salary that Greene's Frank Lemont received monthly as a lieutenant in the 5th Maine allowed him to assist his widowed mother. He explained that "money is not what keeps me here...but so long as I am here and I think I ought to stay, I shall give the money part its due consideration."¹³ Lemont's generous salary was important mainly because it allowed him to support his mother; he was able to serve his country and his



At the urging of his mother, Levi Perry reenlisted for the duration of the war, to help guarantee that his father and his brother had not died in vain.
OFFICIAL PORTFOLIO OF WAR AND NATION (1906).

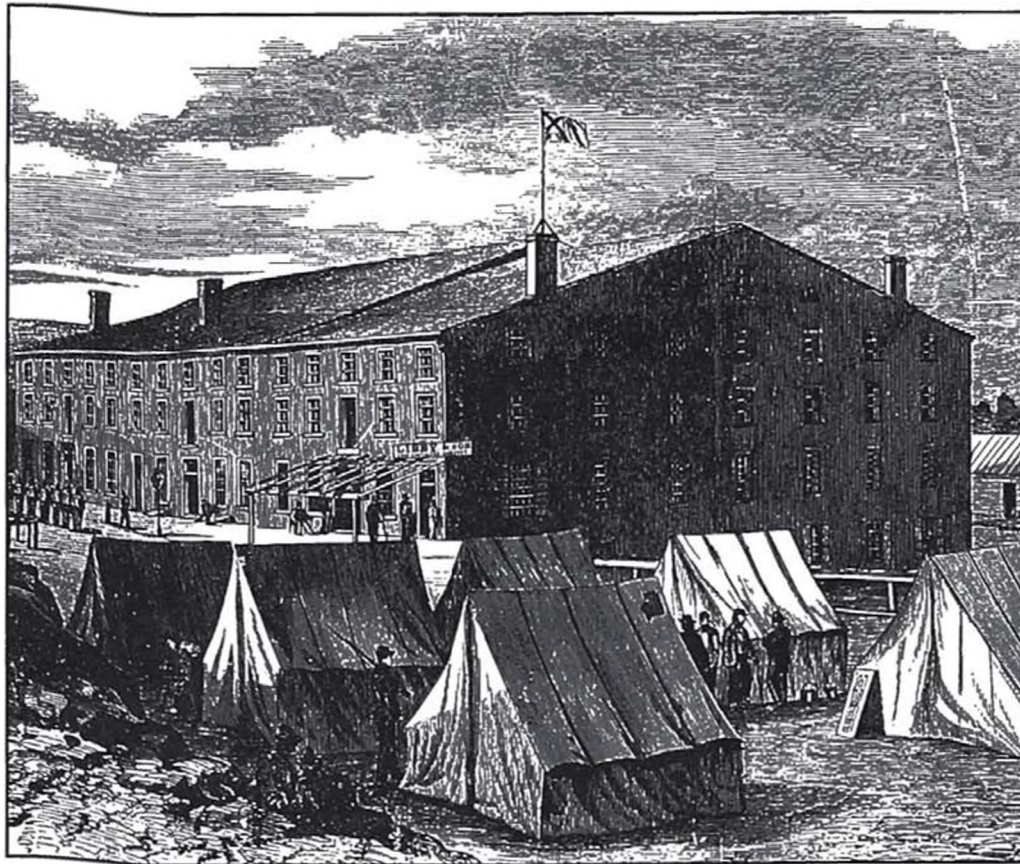
family simultaneously. For most northern soldiers, the tensions between loyalty to country and to family were not so easily resolved. A man serving for three years as a private at \$13.00 per month could not insure the financial security of his family. For men with families, therefore, volunteering for a nine-month regiment was an appealing option: They received a bounty and an exemption from future drafts. Kittery's Albert Manson,

married with children, joined one of the nine-month regiments. He observed: "They are all afraid of being drafted in Kittery. I think we was luckey enlisting when we did."¹⁴ Men with families, he reasoned, were fortunate to avoid longer service and should not be faulted for doing so.

Marshall Phillips of Auburn seems to have agreed. Phillips's sense of loyalty to country inspired him to name a son after the president and to volunteer in 1861 for three years. He praised Lincoln's call for more troops in August of 1862, and he agreed with the use of bounties to stimulate volunteers. After about a year of service, however, he felt he had done enough, and wrote that he "should like it if they would come out and let me come home." Others should be doing their share. Familial obligations tugged at him. "I feel some times as if I done wrong by inlisting and leaveing you with a family of small children," he told his wife. Phillips served his three years, but the lure of a \$600 bounty was insufficient to cause him to reenlist. As he pointed out to his brother, "I am aware you can get good pay, but money is not much in comparison with life and health and a family at home."¹⁵ Loyalty to family inspired some Mainers to enlist for short stints, while it motivated others to continue fighting. It was also influential, in complex ways, in the voting of Mainers in the election of 1864.

The Election of 1864

Although Maine soldiers' loyalties were conflicted, they expressed an abiding faith in the Union cause. Soldiers' attitudes toward the 1864 election, coming after three long, hard years of war, demonstrate the strength of their convictions. The 1864 election pitted Lincoln against Democratic challenger George McClellan. Lincoln's reelection meant that the war would continue until the Union was saved; McClellan offered the possibility of a negotiated peace, perhaps without a restored Union.¹⁶ The election was particularly important to soldiers held in Confederate prison camps, since continued war meant the extension of their hardship and deprivation for an indeterminate period. The fact that individuals starving in Confederate



Soldiers in Confederate prison camps, fully aware that Lincoln's reelection in 1864 meant extending their hardship, nevertheless voted overwhelmingly for "Abe and Andy."

Broadside from MHS Collections; Libby Prison from THE AMERICAN SOLDIER AND SAILOR IN WAR.

prisons continued to support Lincoln, when a negotiated settlement could have released them sooner, suggests an extraordinary devotion to the Union. Hannibal Johnson and his fellow inmates near Columbia voted three to one in favor of Lincoln; John Sheahan and the others in Richland Prison backed Lincoln sixty-seven to seven. In Libby Prison, Abner Small chose Lincoln, and the tally there was roughly three to one. Small saw his vote as a duty to his family in Hallowell and to "the cause of



REPUBLICAN TICKET.

For President,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

OF ILLINOIS.

For Vice President,

HANNIBAL HAMLIN,

OF MAINE.

Electors for President and Vice

President of the United States.

Joseph M. Root, of Erie county.
Frederick Hassaurek, of Hamilton.

- 1st District—Benjamin Eggleston.
- 2d " William M. Dickson.
- 3d " Frank McWhinney.
- 4th " John Riley Knox.
- 5th " Dresden W.H. Howard.
- 6th " John M. Kellum.
- 7th " Nelson Bush.
- 8th " Abraham Thomson.
- 9th " John F. Henkle.
- 10th " Hezekiah S. Bundy.
- 11th " Daniel B. Stewart.
- 12th " Richard P. L. Baber.
- 13th " John Beatty.
- 14th " Williard Slocum.
- 15th " Joseph Ankeny.
- 16th " Edward Ball.
- 17th " John A. Davenport.
- 18th " William K. Upham.
- 19th " Samuel B. Philbrick.
- 20th " George W. Brooke.
- 21st " Norman K. Mackenzie.

making secure, lasting, and forever free, the government under which they are living.”¹⁷ In Small’s opinion, Lincoln’s reelection would help guarantee his family the type of government he preferred. Considering the deplorable conditions in Confederate prisons, continued support for Lincoln from men like Small, Sheahan, and Johnson indicates a remarkable faith in the northern cause.

George Verrill of Norway detailed the 1864 election results for the 17th Maine: a landslide victory for Lincoln. As for many soldiers, this was Verrill’s first presidential election, and he cast his vote for Lincoln.¹⁸ Alfred True voted at home in Bethel, where he was recovering from a wound suffered at Winchester. The injury had not convinced him that the war should end without Union, however. His diary

states: “Deposited my first vote today. Voted for Abe & Andy.”¹⁹ Indeed, for many wounded men a negotiated peace would have trivialized their sacrifice.

According to Biddeford’s John Haley, the army needed “men who regard the disruption of the Union as a great calamity

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the Union, but it also represented loyalty to family and friends who had sacrificed for the cause.

Conclusion

Maine soldiers remaining in the army in the fall of 1864 succeeded in blending loyalty to country with loyalty to family. In the service of both, they continued fighting. Not all soldiers remained; family loyalty drew some home again after a three-year enlistment. Most, however, decided that their families could continue without them for a while longer, and that the family would derive more, in the long run, from a northern victory than from their immediate return.

Preserving the Union meant preserving democracy and freedom for their families. In this abstract sense, loyalty to country and loyalty to family became one. Nevertheless, soldiers were torn by the material tensions between these loyalties: They felt a duty to see that their families had enough to eat. Many women, certainly, could take care of themselves and did so. Others – those with many children or those weakened by age or illness – needed assistance. Some soldiers with such families opted not to reenlist. In dire emergencies, they even deserted to get back to needy families.

Confederate soldiers experienced greater distance between these conflicting loyalties. Indeed, family loyalties convinced many to desert.²⁵ But the northern soldier found it easier to reconcile family loyalty and patriotism. Their pay went further to support home and family, and the northern farms were not under direct enemy threat. Finally, the chances were greater that an able-bodied male would be at home. The larger northern population meant that fewer male family members had to serve at any one time. For many Union soldiers, the knowledge that a brother or uncle was assisting the family made the decision to continue fighting easier.

To remain in the army in 1864, after three hard years of fighting, men needed assurance that their families were getting food and shelter. According to one recent history, “military

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service was possible when [the soldier] believed that things were all right at home."²⁶ By the end of 1864, many Confederate soldiers had been deprived of this assurance: things were certainly not all right at home. Most northern families were doing well by comparison. Soldiers from Maine and across the North were thus able to blend loyalty to family with loyalty to the Union through the tough times of 1864, and to persevere until victory the following spring.

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NOTES

¹The author dedicates this paper to his late father Daniel DeRoche, and to his great-great-grandfather Ivory Goodwin of the 9th Maine Volunteer Regiment. Also, the author thanks Dr. Marli Weiner of the University of Maine for her guidance, and thanks his family for their support.

²William B. Jordan, Jr., *Maine in the Civil War: A Bibliographical Guide* (Portland: Maine Historical Society, 1976), p. 72.

³See Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), p. 44: "For every Yank whose primary goal was emancipation were to be found several whose chief goal was the Union and the system of government that it represented."

⁴See James M. McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 304: In the battle of Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862, General Ambrose Burnside ordered the northern soldiers to repeatedly attack the Confederate's strong defensive position. When the fighting ended, "the Union army had suffered 12,600 casualties, the Confederate fewer than 5,000. And nothing had been achieved."

⁵Peleg Bradford to his mother, January 8, 1863; Bradford to his father, August 23, 1863, Bradford family papers, Fogler Library, University of Maine.

⁶Peleg Bradford to his mother, March 20, 1863; Bradford to his brothers, October 6, 1863, Bradford family papers. Owen Bradford volunteered while only fifteen. Peleg suffered a serious wound in the Wilderness Campaign of 1864, necessitating amputation of a leg. Owen died in battle later that year, before turning seventeen. (While the muster role at Augusta lists Owen as eighteen at enlistment, his parents' marker in the Highland Cemetery in Carmel indicates that he was only fifteen.)

⁷William Adams to his sister, March 4, 1863, Adams Papers, Maine Historical Society.

⁸John Sheahan to his parents, September 6, 1862, Sheahan Papers, Maine Historical Society. John Sheahan's brother died at Gettysburg.

⁹Levi Perry to his sister, May 25 and August 31, 1863, Perry Papers, Maine Historical Society.

¹⁰Daniel Brown to his brother, July 28, 1863, Letters of D. Brown, Maine Historical Society.

¹¹The Mainers' view was shared by soldiers from throughout the North. See Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences* (New York: Viking Press, 1988), p. 84: "While most soldiers were eager that shirkers be drafted, they were also reluctant that their brothers, sons, or fathers be exposed to the hardships of military life."

¹²Levi Perry to his mother, December 20, 1863, Perry Papers. Levi Perry's father died in a prison camp and a brother was killed at Gettysburg.

¹³Frank Lemont to his mother, May 9 and April 14, Bean Collection, Fogler Library. Lemont's decision eventually brought tragedy for his family, as he was killed in the Wilderness fighting of 1864. His death is described in Bicknell's *History of the Fifth Regiment Maine Volunteers* (Portland: Hall Davis, 1871), p. 359.

¹⁴Albert Manson to his wife, March 10, 1863, Manson Papers, Fogler Library.

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¹⁵Marshall Phillips to his wife, July 25, 1862; Phillips to his brother, November 15, 1863, Phillips Papers, Maine Historical Society. Phillips's son was named Abe Lincoln Phillips.

¹⁶The significance of the 1864 vote among Union soldiers is discussed by Reid Mitchell in his essay "The Perseverance of the Soldiers," in Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *Why the Confederacy Lost* (New York: Oxford, 1992), p. 122. According to another historian, "soldiers saw the election as involving a clear-cut issue between peace and war." See Earl J. Hess, *Liberty, Virtue, and Progress: Northerners and Their War for the Union* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), p. 91.

¹⁷Johnson reported the prison vote: Lincoln 889, McClellan 272. See Hannibal A. Johnson, ed., *The Sword of Honor* (Worcester: Blanchard Press, 1906), p. 23; Diary of John Sheahan, November 8, 1864, Sheahan Papers; Harold A. Small, ed., *The Road to Richmond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), pp. 175, 203. Small and his comrades gave Lincoln 267 votes and McClellan, 91.

¹⁸Diary of George Verrill, November 8, 1864, Verrill Papers, Fogler Library. Verrill's 17th Maine voted as follows: Lincoln 201, McClellan 47.

¹⁹Diary of Alfred True, November 8, 1864, True Papers, Maine Historical Society.

²⁰Ruth Silliker, ed., *The Rebel Yell and the Yankee Hurrah* (Camden: Down East Books, 1985), pp. 141, 196.

²¹Henry McIntire to Lyman Bolster, November 10 and undated, 1862, McIntire Papers, Fogler Library.

²²Beverly Kallgren, ed., "Dear Friend Anna": *The Civil War Letters of a Common Soldier From Maine* (Orono: University of Maine, 1992), pp. 44, 65.

²³Frank Dickerson to his father, November 11, 18, 1864, in H. Draper Hunt ed., *Dearest Father: The Civil War Letters of Lt. Frank Dickerson, A Son of Belfast, Maine* (Unity: North Country Press, 1992), pp. 124-25.

²⁴Among Maine soldiers whose votes were officially recorded the result was: Lincoln 4,174 and McClellan 741 – or 85 percent for Lincoln. See Josiah H. Benton, *Voting in the Field* (Boston: Privately Printed, 1915), 127. The total separately tabulated Union soldier vote was 78 percent for Lincoln. See McPherson, *Ordeal*, p. 457.

²⁵Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and Narratives of War," in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 171-199. According to Faust, "It may well have been because of its women that the South lost the Civil War." See p. 199.

²⁶Reid Mitchell, "The Northern Soldier and his Community," in Maris A. Vinovskis ed., *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 86. See also Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

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