LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

"THEY CANNOT CATCH GUERRILLAS IN THE MOUNTAINS

ANY MORE THAN A COW CAN CATCH FLEAS":

GUERRILLA WARFARE IN WESTERN VIRGINIA, 1861-1865

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

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INTRODUCTION

The American Civil War unleashed great violence and chaos in the western mountains of Virginia. There, in Appalachia, guerrilla warfare impacted a greater number of southerners than the war's organized military campaigns. It quickly evolved into two distinct types: hostilities aimed against outside invaders and violence that occurred among neighbors. Missouri and Arkansas experienced this conflict on the largest scale, but the Appalachian Mountains, where the terrain provided shelter and the element of surprise for guerrillas, also suffered a sizable amount of armed internal conflict. From northern Georgia, western North Carolina and Virginia, and eastern Tennessee and Kentucky, mountaineers battled national and state upheaval while trying to discern which political allegiances offered the securest future. This was especially challenging for those who lived along the northern border of the Confederacy, an area that changed hands as organized troops battled for supremacy. In addition, those in western Virginia experienced turbulence on two levels—a division of the state occurring within the division of the country. The conflict there between Unionists and secessionists remained bitter throughout the war, even after 50 counties split away to form the state of West Virginia in 1863.

Guerrilla conflict in the Confederacy created an outlet for those with strong family ties to contribute to the war effort close to home, but it also opened the door for violence and lawlessness to spread in contested areas. According to historian Daniel Sutherland, guerrilla conflict was not a sideshow to the larger war, but a crucial part, influencing the strategy of both politicians and soldiers. "It touched the lives of untold numbers of southern civilians and their communities. In much of the South, it was more than just part of the larger war; it was the war itself, a war with its own rules, its own chronology, its own policies, its own turning points, its

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own heroes, villains, and victims. In the end, it altered the nature of the entire conflict to a startling degree."[1]

An understanding of that guerrilla conflict, then, is essential to gain a complete picture of the Civil War. However, for nearly a century after the war's end, scholars largely ignored this particular subject. In the foreword of Virgil Carrington Jones's 1956 groundbreaking work *Gray Ghosts and Rebel Raiders*, Bruce Catton lamented that guerrilla warfare in the Civil War had been treated "as a colorful, annoying, but largely unimportant side issue."[2] For the citizens who lived under the terror and anarchy guerrilla warfare provoked, however, the subject was anything but a side issue. Soldiers who fought in the great campaigns could clearly identify their enemies, but those left at home often had no such luxury. As law and order collapsed in the chaos of a lingering war, southerners became trapped in a style of conflict that did not differentiate between combatant and civilian. The unpredictability of when violence might occur added to the horror, as neighbor turned against neighbor and communities split over political differences.[3]

Western Virginia's unique civil war occurring within the context of the national struggle caused an area once united against the aristocratic eastern half of the state to be divided by a new state line in June 1863. The area impacted included all of present-day West Virginia and southwestern Virginia. The northern counties bordered the Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Ohio state lines, while the western and southern boundary continued along Virginia's 1861 boarder touching Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The eastern border followed the higher
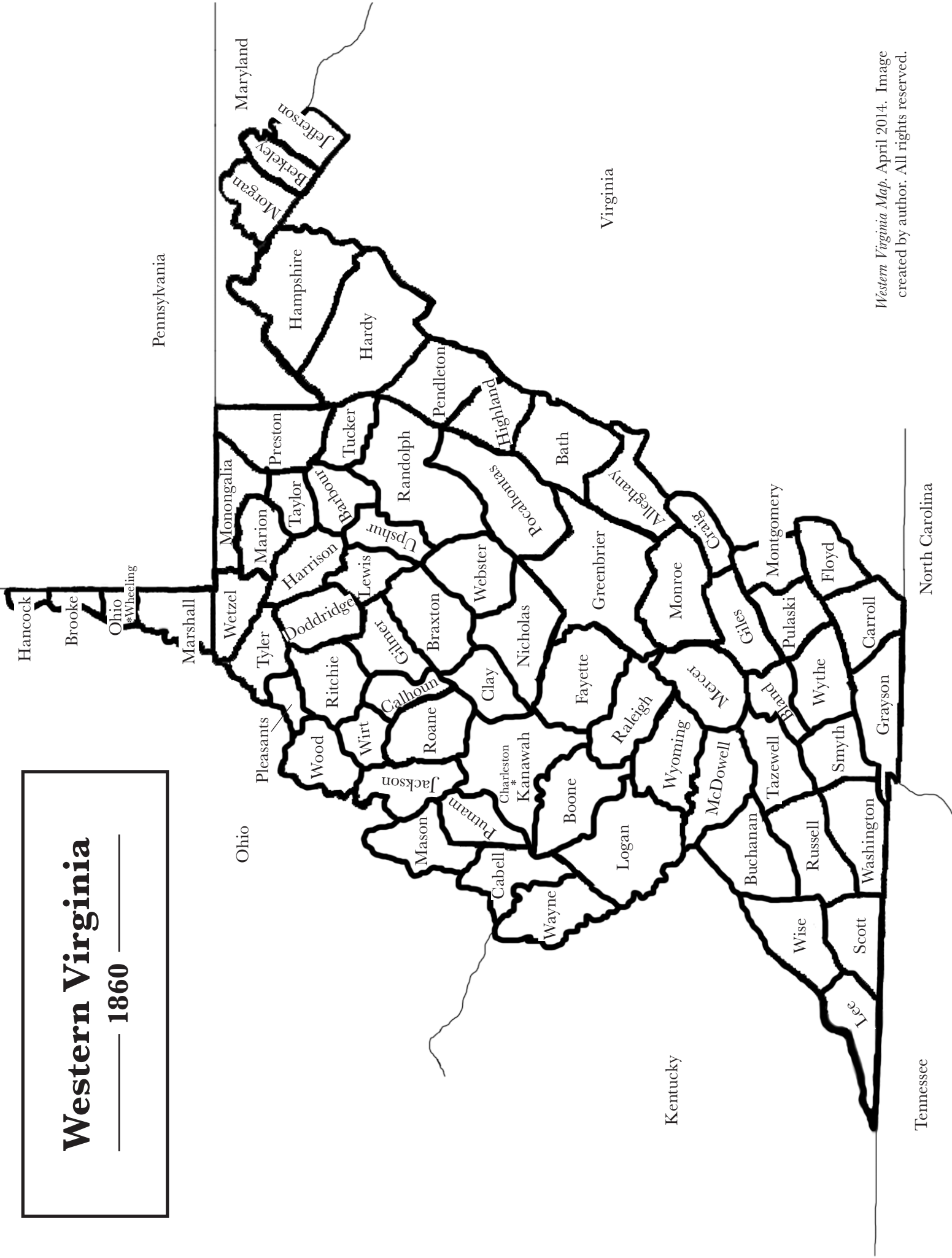
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[1] Daniel E. Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," *Civil War History* 46:1 (Mar. 2000): 5.
[2] Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," 5; Bruce Catton, foreword to Virgil Carrington Jones, *Gray Ghosts and Rebel Raiders: The Daring Exploits of the Confederate Guerrillas* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1956), vii.
[3] For a more in-depth study on the characteristics of guerrilla warfare during the Civil War, see Michael Fellman's introduction in *Inside War*: *The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Western Virginia

—— 1860 ——

Hancock

Brooke

Ohio
*Wheeling

Marshall

Wetzel

Pleasants

Wood

Wirt

Jackson

Mason

Putnam

Cabell

Wayne

Tyler

Ritchie

Calhoun

Roane

Gilmer

Doddridge

Harrison

Monongalia

Marion

Taylor

Barbour

Upshur

Lewis

Preston

Tucker

Randolph

Braxton

Webster

Clay

Nicholas

Kanawah
Charleston
*

Boone

Logan

Fayette

Raleigh

Wyoming

McDowell

Buchanan

Wise

Scott

Lee

Hampshire

Hardy

Pendleton

Highland

Pocahontas

Bath

Greenbrier

Alleghany

Craig

Monroe

Mercer

Giles

Montgomery

Pulaski

Floyd

Carroll

Wythe

Bland

Tazewell

Russell

Washington

Grayson

Smyth

Morgan

Berkeley

Jefferson

Maryland

Pennsylvania

Ohio

Kentucky

Tennessee

North Carolina

Virginia

elevation on a Virginia topographic map, with Carroll, Floyd, Montgomery, Craig, Alleghany, Bath, and Highland Counties marking the boundary.

A study of guerrilla warfare in western Virginia is valuable to the historiography of Civil War studies in at least four ways. First, it supports findings from studies of other areas of Appalachia that seek to explain the prevalence of such conflict in the mountains. The importance of kin was central to mountaineers' actions, and family ties contributed to the brutality of the guerrilla conflict in the area. Second, such a study challenges the myth of a Union Appalachia during the war. While some areas of the mountains remained loyal to the Union, the region as a whole was not united and contained much secessionist sentiment. Third, it offers the backdrop for the political wrangling on both state and national levels that culminated in the creation of the state of West Virginia. Some politicians in favor of the new state argued that a separate state was necessary to pacify the region. Finally, it fills an important gap in the historiography of Civil War Virginia.

What work has been done on guerrilla warfare in Virginia focuses mainly on northern Virginia. Western Virginia needs further study and consideration because it was unique from any other area in Appalachia or the Confederacy. When historian Stephen Ash wrote about the occupied South, he opted not to consider western Virginia at all, because in that area it was debatable "just who the real 'invaders' were," and he believed it deserved a separate telling.[4] Although Appalachia Virginia was similar to other areas of Appalachia in some respects—the citizens, for example, held firm to their beliefs regardless of outside influences or what the political climate dictated—it was unique in that a portion of its residents successfully seceded

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[4] Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), x.

from their state, thereby officially asserting their independence and intention to do what was best for themselves, regardless of consequences. In the few studies available on western Virginia, historians have separated the southwestern portion from the group of counties that now make up West Virginia and do not consider the area as the bloc that it was before the war, with no clear line dividing north from south.[5]

By the mid-nineteenth century, western Virginia was separated from the eastern part of the state by geology, economic systems, social characteristics, and political orientations. These regional tensions had existed since the earliest days of settlement. The Allegheny Mountains formed the most distinct physical division within Virginia, separating eastern Virginia from western. Eastern Virginia's agricultural economy relied extensively on slave labor, a system not conducive to the rough terrain in the west where significantly fewer slaves lived. The most divisive differences, however, lay in the political realm. The planter aristocracy from mostly English descent in the Tidewater and Piedmont regions dominated Virginia politics, while settlers in the western part of the state were Scotch-Irish with more democratic roots. Those Scotch-Irish roots had created a culture filled with endemic violence and retributive justice where individuals were the guardians of their own interests and self-sovereignty kept the order. Politically, eastern and western Virginia differed on issues such as internal improvements, education, land policies, and taxation; ultimately eastern control of state politics ensured those disagreements were

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[5] Kenneth Noe correctly points out that several regions existed within these east/west sections, and that antebellum Virginians referred to "northwest" and "southwest" as frequently as "east" and "west." However, while ethnicity, economics, and slavery divided the two western regions, they also paradoxically united them with mutual antagonism against the eastern regions. What line there was between the two western sections was blurred and existed much further north than the present day West Virginia state line. For a more detailed discussion on the sectional and regional differences in antebellum Virginia, see Kenneth Noe's "Red String Scare: Civil War Southwest Virginia and the Heroes of America," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 69:3 (July 1992): 301-322, especially pages 303-311.

decided to benefit the east.[6]

  As westerners grew decidedly frustrated at their political weakness, Virginia took steps to

create more sectional parity. In 1850, the state passed a new constitution, which offered political

reforms such as universal white male suffrage, the direct election of local and state officials, and

increased western political representation. Solutions were also put forward to address the

transportation problems in the western portion of the state, where the mountains served as a

physical barrier between the sections. Construction on the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad began

in 1850, connecting the southwestern part of the state to Lynchburg. The long discussed

Kanawha Canal to connect the James River to the Kanawha River in the northwestern part of the

state gained traction in the early part of the century and by 1840 it was completed to Lynchburg.

  These measures, however, failed to completely stifle the sectional antagonism. As

railroads became the dominant mode of transportation, plans for the Canal stalled. Virginians in

the northern part of the state turned to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to transport their goods,

connecting that portion of the state economically to their northern neighbors rather than to the

rest of Virginia. Other socioeconomic and political differences remained, as well. The developing

western industries of salt and coal relied on free labor and were very different from eastern

Virginia's slave-based agricultural economy. The 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sandford* Supreme Court

decision and John Brown's 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry inflamed old sectional tensions. In most

counties in western Virginia, fewer than 10% of white families owned slaves, and in no counties

did more than 20%, a stark contrast to the counties in the eastern, more slavery-based portion of

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  [6] David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed, Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 765-771.

the state.[7]

While these differences caused sharp disagreements, a state split was not necessarily imminent before the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln and the subsequent secession crisis, nor did a clear dividing line exist, should such a rift occur. At Virginia's April 17, 1861 secession vote, nearly two-thirds of the votes opposing the measure came from the northwestern counties. North of Charleston support for the Confederacy was scarce, since those counties' economic systems resembled that of Ohio rather than the rest of Virginia, and secession from the Union would leave them surrounded by enemy territory on three sides. South of Charleston, however, sentiment for the Union was not as strong. Mountaineers tended to side with whichever political institution they believed most benefitted their livelihood and the safety of their families. While secession from the Union meant almost immediate invasion to those in the northern counties, those in the southern counties did not face such an immediate threat. Their loyalty lay with their state.[8]

Although a new state eventually formed in 1863, not all of the counties it included solidly supported the split. When the First Wheeling Convention met in May 1861 to discuss the formation of a new government loyal to the Union, nine southern counties in present day West Virginia voted solidly to remain with Virginia and secede from the Union: Greenbrier, Monroe, Fayette, Raleigh, Mercer, Boone, Wyoming, McDowell, and Logan. The counties in the West Virginia panhandle were also strongly pro-secession. These counties remained committed to Virginia and the Confederacy as the war progressed, even when politically they were included in

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[7] Ronald L. Heinemann et al., *Old Dominion, New Commonwealth: A History of Virginia 1607-2007* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 194-195; Otis K. Rice and Stephen W. Brown, *West Virginia, A History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 90.

[8] Rice, *West Virginia*, 90; Robert R. Mackey, *The Uncivil War, Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861-1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 97.

the new state of West Virginia and militarily lay in Union hands. The presence of the Union army

allowed the pro-Union northwestern Virginia delegates to return to Wheeling in June 1861 and

form the Restored, or Reorganized, Government of Virginia, with Francis Pierpont as its

governor. The Federal government gave this body legitimacy by granting representation in

Congress. The Restored Government then approved the creation of a new state comprised of 39

western counties. The Second Wheeling Convention convened in November 1861, and delegates

debated the new state's status as a free or slave state, the number of counties it incorporated, and

its name. Ultimately the U.S. Congress passed the statehood bill that required gradual

emancipation of slaves and allowed the new state of West Virginia to include 50 counties, many

of which never voted on the measure or acknowledged the change until well after the war.

Abraham Lincoln signed the bill on December 31, 1862 and West Virginia officially became a

state on June 20, 1863.[9]

The new state, however, was divided in loyalty. Little disparity existed in the number of

troops who fought for each side throughout the war as enlisted West Virginians served equally

for both the Union and the Confederacy.[10] Similarly, the southwestern counties that ultimately

remained a part of Virginia were not solidly Confederate. Unionism there was visible from the

beginning; some communities remained loyal throughout the conflict despite pressure from

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[9] Rice, *West Virginia*, 120.

[10] Many West Virginia historians have tried to emphasize the divided nature of the state throughout the Civil War. In an interview about the publication of *West Virginia and the Civil War: Mountaineers Are Always Free*, Mark Snell stressed that West Virginia was the most divided state in the country, with half of its soldiers fighting for the Union and the other half for the Confederacy. ("Interview: Mark Snell," http://bullrunnings.wordpress.com/2011/11/17/interview-mark-snell-west-virginia-and-the-civil-war/, accessed October 21, 2013.) Tim McKinney also tried to debunk the myth that West Virginia was "a bastion of Nationalism or Union solidarity," noting that 25 of the state's 50 counties supported the Confederacy and did not want to break with Virginia. This compromised 2/3 of the state's total area and 40% of its population. Even in some Union counties, secessionist minorities were as high as 40% (Tim McKinney, *Robert E. Lee and the 35th Star* (Charleston, WV: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1993), 2). Also see McKinney's *The Civil War in Fayette County West Virginia* (Charleston, WV: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1995) and Otis K. Rice's *West Virginia* for further examples of the lack of solidarity in the region during the war.

surrounding areas to conform. This fierce division that was not separated by any clear geographical lines created an ideal environment for guerrilla warfare.[11]

Western Virginia's natural resources and transportation routes held value for both the Confederacy and Union, and early in the war both sides conducted campaigns to secure the area. The armies' struggle to gain control created chaos, and the area's mountainous terrain with its crags and ravines offered a safe haven for deserters or bushwhackers who wished to evade capture or attack enemies without being observed. It also made transporting support to counterguerrilla units difficult, giving guerrilla fighters an added advantage. Bushwhackers could, and did, spring from the mountainous nooks and crannies, waylaying lone soldiers or civilians. Local guerrillas knew the backroads and paths in a way those brought in to oppose them did not, which added to their efficiency.[12]

Because of their tendency to attack at any time and from anywhere, identifying the western Virginia guerrillas and discerning their intentions proved difficult. Some targeted only soldiers, while others attacked without restraint. Both pro-Union and pro-Confederate guerrilla bands formed in different areas of western Virginia. Some wanted to contribute to the war effort in their own way, while others wanted to take advantage of the turbulent times for their own selfish ambition. The confusion concerning the identity of these guerrillas extended to the vocabulary both Union and Confederate contemporaries used to describe them. "Guerrilla," "bushwhacker," "bandit," "ranger," "scamp," "marauder," and "deserter" were all used, often interchangeably, to describe people who did not fight using traditional tactics. While each term

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[11] Cathleen Carlson Reynolds, "A Pragmatic Loyalty: Unionism in Southwestern Virginia, 1861-1865" (Master's Thesis, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1987), 27.
[12] William W. Freehling, *The South vs. the South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 56; Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 20.

carried its own specific meaning, those meanings were often blurred depending on the connotation the writer desired to communicate.

"Guerrilla" was typically used as a more generous term by sympathetic writers to describe irregular fighters who usually refrained from overt stealing or vandalism, at least against those of the same political orientation. "Bushwhacker" carried a more dishonorable meaning and referred to those who robbed, raped, and murdered without restraint. Nancy Hunt, a resident of Mountain Cove, West Virginia, made this distinction when describing two different bands operating in the vicinity of her hometown. While she considered members of one band to be murderous thugs or bushwhackers, she described the other band as guerrillas, writing, "I never heard of Riley bushwhacking. He gives them a chance for their lives."[13] The term "bushwhacker" originated in Missouri, initially meaning armed bands of men who committed depredations upon the local population. They hid in the bush and "whacked" or killed those who passed. During the Civil War, a "bushwhacker" was typically a Confederate sympathizer and a "jayhawker" his northern counterpart, but that term was only used in the western and trans-Mississippi theaters. Many historians use the term "guerrilla" to encompass both "bushwhacker" and "jayhawker," a practice some of the war's contemporaries engaged in, as well.[14]

At times, civilians used the term "bushwhacker" to slander their enemies, regardless of whether or not the person they were referencing actually engaged in irregular warfare. Sometimes Unionists equated "secesh," a slang term for southern sympathizers, with "bushwhacker," insinuating that all secessionists were lawless vagabonds. The interchangeable

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[13] Nancy Hunt, September 3, 1863, Letters of Nancy Hunt, Virginia Historical Society, Special Collections, Richmond, VA (VHS).

[14] Gary C. Walker, *The War in Southwest Virginia, 1861-1865* (Roanoke, VA: Gurtner Graphics and Printing Co., 1985), 29; Jeffrey Weaver, *The Civil War in Buchanan and Wise Counties, Bushwhackers' Paradise* (Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, 1994), 63.

terminology can make understanding the nature of the guerrilla war challenging. Organized military forces often failed to differentiate between raiders, rangers, marauders, and guerrillas, but civilians usually did in their actions, if not their words. To them, partisans and raiders were more or less responsive to the government, while guerrillas were citizens, not soldiers. They were, therefore, an arm of their community, not their government, and usually operated close to home. While a part of the war, the war was a personal, not a national, one to them. Because their survival was dependent on friendly natives, guerrillas were inseparable from their community.[15]

To help clarify the ambiguity, historians have attempted to break the lines of irregular warfare down into three different types. Most of the literature, however, emphasizes guerrillas' tactics rather than their motivations, an approach that does not correlate well to the independence inherent in guerrilla warfare. The first type, raiding warfare, was the most organized of the three, and involved regular cavalry officers—Union or Confederate—temporarily operating outside of the regular command structure. These raiders, usually with the permission of regular authorities, attacked strategic locations, such as railroad bridges or depots. They lived off the land, helping themselves to supplies from houses of enemy civilians and inflicting maximum damage before slipping back into the safety of their own lines.

Another type of irregular warfare was partisan warfare, conducted by partisans or rangers who were government sanctioned irregular troops loosely attached to the conventional army. Many of these groups formed immediately upon the outbreak of war. They lived behind enemy lines, receiving support and supplies from sympathetic civilians. To avoid capture, partisans mustered for specific operations and then went home after completing them, fading into the local

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[15] Clay Mountcastle, *Punitive War, Confederate Guerrillas and Union Reprisals* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 3; Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 48-49.

civilian population. To try to organize these groups and gain some control over them, the

Confederate Government passed the Partisan Ranger Act in 1862. This put partisans on the

government payroll, gave them prisoner of war status in the eyes of many Union officials, and

stipulated they give any weapons they captured to the Confederate government. The rangers

were permitted to keep anything else they captured, making the position of a partisan as

potentially lucrative as it was dangerous. The act was revoked in 1864, however, because

partisans were too independent to accept direction from the army, and their actions often harmed

loyal Confederate citizens.

The third category of guerrilla warfare identified by historians encompasses the rest of

the participants—those who operated in the least civilized or honorable way according to

nineteenth-century rules of warfare. This is usually called the "people's war" or just the

"guerrilla war," deriving its name from its participants being regular civilians who became

involved over local concerns. Bushwhackers, Jayhawkers, and bandits operated in this realm,

taking advantage of the breakdown in law and order the war brought and generally paying no

attention to national goals. They victimized regardless of age or sex, although they generally

killed only men and boys. While the word rape does not often surface in primary sources,

historian Michael Fellman noted that in Missouri "extreme brutality toward women was

common, including what one might call near rape or symbolic rape, often combined with looting

and the killing of men." A similar pattern emerged in western Virginia, where women were not

exempt from the violence and brutality. Because the term "guerrilla war" is often applied

exclusively to this last category of guerrillas, historians now typically use the term "irregular

warfare" to incorporate all three types.[16]

The inherent challenge historians encounter when researching irregular conflict is a lack of sources, especially firsthand accounts from the guerrillas themselves. Many guerrillas who gained considerable prominence during the war in western Virginia, such as Champ Fergeson, John McNeill, and John Hunt Morgan, did not survive long enough to provide such accounts. The nature of the war also meant that many of the participants were mountaineers who remained close to home, many of whom were illiterate or lived in such rough conditions during the war that they had no means to record their thoughts or hold correspondence. Therefore, most of the surviving sources are from the point of view of the victims rather than the perpetrators of the attacks. Because the sources are scarce, drawing a complete picture of guerrilla warfare can be challenging. However, the guerrillas' actions hint at their motives, thus offering the means to determine the different motivations that led to their involvement.[17]

Not only is it possible to study the subject with limited sources, but its scope and prevalence make such study necessary. Scholarly work over the past fifty years has proven guerrilla warfare was a crucial part of the larger war and the only war many civilians encountered in western Virginia and the rest of the Confederacy. Until the mid-twentieth century, guerrilla conflict was essentially ignored because, as John Inscoe speculated, Lost Cause writers dominated the literature in the years following the war, and "there was no room for divided loyalties, internal dissent, or guerrilla warfare." However, Casey Tefertiller's assertion that "shock value always has longer shelf life than tedious detail" rings true about this topic, as local

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[16] Fellman, *Inside War,* 207, Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," 6.
[17] Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 47; John C. Inscoe, "Guerrilla War and Remembrance," *Appalachian Journal* 34:1 (Fall 2006): 76.

lore and oral tradition kept the atrocities committed during the guerrilla war in the public

memory. As the stories were passed down from generation to generation, many grew legendary.

Local amateur historians captured these accounts, but did little to verify their accuracy or curb

the mythology interwoven into them. What few biographical works historians did do focused

only on colorful personalities, such as the partisan John S. Mosby in northern Virginia or the

notorious bushwhacker William Quantrill in Missouri, showing them as heroic and romantic

adventurers rather than treating them in a scholarly way.[18]

Changes in modern warfare in the twentieth century sent historians on a search for

historical relevance, and the beginning of guerrilla studies emerged. Elihu J. Sutherland helped to

pave the way when he set out to create a folk history of the Sandy Basin—an area that included

most of present-day Dickenson County—based on family histories of its first settlers. From the

1920s to the 1940s, he interviewed over 100 residents about their memories or stories their

parents and grandparents told. Historian Ralph Mann later used this collection to discover new

truths about the nature of guerrilla warfare in Appalachia during the Civil War. He concluded that

it was shaped by kinship networks, gender roles, and community dynamics rather than

economics or politics.[19]

In the 1960s and 1970s the scope of research broadened and the field gained

sophistication with an improved quality of scholarly examination. The Vietnam War brought new

words, such as "insurgency" and "counterinsurgency," into the study, and the widening interest in

the Civil War's irregular war created a new historiographical trend, one that encompassed a

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[18] Inscoe, "Guerrilla War," 75; Casey Tefertiller, *Wyatt Earp: The Life Behind the Legend* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1999), 157; Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," 5-7.
[19] Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," 7-9; Inscoe, "Guerrilla War," 79.

greater geographical spread. Previous writers had focused only on Missouri's guerrilla war or the partisan war in northern Virginia that Mosby waged, but in the 1970s, the western and trans-Mississippi theaters attracted the attention. Missouri received little attention from writers, and Virginia received essentially no attention at all, as the only mention that decade of guerrilla warfare in the state was confined to a single issue of the *Civil War Times Illustrated*.[20]

Phillip Paludan opened another new field of study in 1981 when he published *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War*. He looked at the war's social impact and put a human face on the brutality of the guerrilla conflict, focusing on the victims rather than the purveyors of irregular warfare. *Victims* told the story of a remote Appalachian valley in North Carolina, where 13 Unionists ranging from ages 13-59 were shot by Confederate soldiers in January 1863. Calling the deaths "atrocities," Paludan claimed that looking at only 13 of the over 600,000 casualties of the Civil War forced the reader to confront the horror that the large, faceless number obscures. He explored the lives of specific people to show the "capacity to commit atrocity" that humans have had throughout history. He also noted that the guerrilla war was a "footnote in the study of the war" and called for additional consideration of it. His aim, then, was to show how that type of war tested allegiances and loyalties and what that testing cost in anxiety and anguish.[21]

Paludan's worked paved the way for Michael Fellman's definitive 1989 *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War*. While Virgil Carrington Jones had raised awareness of the subject thirty years before, Fellman's work became the model for future historians studying guerrilla warfare. Daniel Sutherland noted that, astonishingly, Fellman

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[20] Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," 10-13; Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 22.
[21] Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," 15; Phillip Shaw Paludan, *Victims, A True Story of the Civil War* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), ix-x.

was the first scholar to use archival manuscript collections in his research, including those at the National Archives, and "the result, a grimly realistic account of the raw, unregulated, no-holds-barred nature of the contest, exposed the horrific guts of war. There had been nothing like it in guerrilla studies."[22]

The account offered a sophisticated analysis of the Civil War's guerrilla war, and looked closely at its impact on noncombatants. Fellman examined the clash between Unionist and secessionist civilians, the reasons guerrillas became involved, the official government responses, the impact on communities, and the roles that women and blacks played. He said he chose Missouri as his case study because it suffered from the worst guerrilla warfare in the war, and emphasized that for Missourians, the struggle was over the survival of their culture, not secession or emancipation. People there knew the difference between civilization and barbarism, but the roots for how people channeled their behavior had been destroyed. Both terror and a sense of justice affected civilians. He concluded that "most rural white Missourians lost a great deal during the war—male kin, property, security, decent communal relations—all building blocks of a normal life. They had to lie and cheat and bear false witness just to survive." While his work was pivotal and showed the complexity of waging war in a deeply divided environment, it was limited in scope since he only examined Confederate guerrillas in Missouri. This left the door open for more research in other areas of the Confederacy and showed the need for an examination of Unionist guerrillas.[23]

Stephen V. Ash joined Fellman in 1995 in deromanticizing the war and demanding more

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[22] Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," 19.
[23] Fellman, *Inside War*, xvi, 22-23, 73; Brian D. McKnight, *Contested Borderland: The Civil War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 6.

attention on the southern civilian population in *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865.* He looked at how the southern experience of occupation changed as the war progressed and how citizens clashed with each other, providing good contextual information for guerrilla studies. While Fellman's findings attracted attention to the guerrilla war and Ash's raised awareness of the great hardships civilians faced, the field itself remained obscured by the continual focus on the organized troops. Mark Grimsley noted in 1997 that the guerrilla struggle remained "one of the relatively forgotten dimensions of the Civil War." In *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865*, Grimsley tried to put guerrillas into the context of broader wartime strategies, looking at Federal attempts to cope with Confederate guerrillas. His work built off of what Archer Jones briefly addressed in *Civil War Command and Strategy, The Process of Victory and Defeat.* Jones noted that the Union army paid for its success against guerrillas and a precarious security of rail communications by seriously weakening its main forces to keep back large numbers of men from the front lines. The Union armies only used two-thirds of their total strength in their campaigns, since the remaining one-third had to occupy conquered territory and combat guerrillas.[24]

Grimsley took a more in-depth look at what the Union's policy was, especially concerning southern civilians. When an early policy of conciliation failed to weaken the Confederacy, the Federal command turned to "hard war," with emancipation as its "touchstone," to demoralize the Confederacy and destroy its economy. In addition to explaining how the North came to such a policy, he also detailed what the policy was like in action. The Union army held a

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[24] Ash, *When the Yankees Came,* x; Mark Grimsley, *Hard Hand of War: Union Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 111; Archer Jones, *Civil War Command and Strategy: The Process of Victory and Defeat* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 151.

liberal attitude toward the general population and practiced retaliation against citizens who assisted the war effort, but Grimsley argued that neither of these measures "did much to curtail the irregular warfare, which continued for the balance of the conflict." Once the Union implemented its policy of hard war, though, its primary objective remained the restoration of the Union, not destruction of the South. Soldiers forged when they needed to forge and retaliated when they were beset by guerrillas, but otherwise they considered civilians peripheral.[25]

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the divided nature of the Confederacy's population, a heavy contributor to the rise of the guerrilla war, garnered increasing attention. In 2001, William Freehling published *The South vs. The South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War.* He argued that "the divided southern homefront crippled Confederate battle heroes." Not only did the "other half" of whites and blacks throughout the South withhold their support from the new Confederacy, they also "piled on psychological, economic, and geographic burdens that ultimately helped flatten white Confederates' resiliency."[26]

As the decade progressed, historians Robert R. Mackey, Clay Mountcastle, and Daniel E. Sutherland disputed how beneficial the guerrilla war really was for the Confederacy and how effective the Union was at countering it. In *The Uncivil War, Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1961-1865*, Mackey looked at guerrilla war aimed against outside invaders while ignoring the aspect of it that occurred among neighbors. He argued that the Confederacy "overtly organized" and fought an irregular conflict that was an integral yet subordinate part of the conventional war, and lost both. After having tried all three types of irregular war—raider,

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[25] Grimsley, *Hard Hand of War*, 2-5, 23, 67, 118-120.
[26] Freehling, *The South vs. The South*; xii-xiii.

partisan, and marauder—the Confederacy surrendered rather than try to continue an irregular war because it had not worked. He also claimed that federal inventiveness, superior organization and logistical support, and the use of Unionists as counterguerrilla groups allowed the Union to stop all types of irregular warfare by early 1865.[27]

Mountcastle disagreed that the Union successfully countered the southern guerrilla war effort, noting that it constantly had to shift its response due to ineffectiveness. In *Punitive War, Confederate Guerrillas and Union Reprisals*, he looked at the Union's response to guerrillas by theater rather than chronologically to show how the irregular war grew throughout the Confederacy at varying times and to varying degrees. As he noted in his title, Mountcastle focused on how the Union waged a punitive war in response to the vexing problem of guerrilla warfare in the South, and he argued the punitive measures ultimately resulted in the Union's victory of the entire war. Much of the extensive damage that was done in the South during the Civil War came as the direct or indirect result of the guerrilla problem. Irregular methods were so common that encountering them was not surprising, yet they became noteworthy because of the effect they had on Union attitudes toward southern civilians and their property.[28]

Daniel Sutherland agreed with Mountcastle that the Union never completely bested Confederate guerrillas in *A Savage Conflict, The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War*. However, he also noted that the independence and unmanageableness of the guerrillas hurt the Confederacy as well, especially when southern officials had an indecisive attitude on how to handle them. When guerrilla warfare pitted neighbor against neighbor, the conflict became local and caused civilians to lose sight of national goals. People began to lose faith in the

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[27] Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 3-5, 21, 197-203.
[28] Mountcastle, *Punitive War*, 1-5.

Confederate government's ability to protect them as the internal war grew more fierce. The guerrillas, however, successfully kept the enemy army in check by demanding constant attention and resources, and showed federal officials that to win the war they had to crush rebellion on the home front as well as be successful in conventional battles. This turned the war more brutal and destructive, until ultimately the tragedy of guerrilla warfare was that "it left people with neither homes nor providers."[29]

While the broad overviews of guerrilla warfare show how it fit into the war as a whole, more focused studies are helpful in determining its nature and impact. Michael Fellman's *Inside War* covered in-depth the Confederate guerrillas in Missouri. Noel Fisher's *War at Every Door* examined the conflict in eastern Tennessee from the beginning of the war through 1869, while Todd Groce looked at Confederate sentiment in the overwhelmingly Unionist mountains of that region in *Mountain Rebels*. As those rebels tried to gain support from Richmond in their struggle for political domination and survival at home, they essentially fought three fronts: a hostile Confederate government, hostile Unionist neighbors, and the occupation by federal forces. Many Confederate sympathizers in what is now southern West Virginia faced many of the same challenges.[30]

The mountains of western North Carolina have also received attention from recent scholarship, most notably from John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney's *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia* and Martin Crawford's *Ashe County's Civil War*. Crawford particularly stressed the importance of kin over economic class in the guerrilla struggle. Brian Steel Wills looked at

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[29] Daniel E. Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict, The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), ix-x, 255.
[30] W. Todd Groce, *Mountain Rebels, East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), xv; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 7.

southeastern Virginia in a combined social, economic, political, and military study in *The War Hits Home*. Jonathan D. Sarris considered north Georgia in *A Separate Civil War* through a study of Fannin and Lumpkin Counties, two mountain communities that had very different responses to the national upheaval, despite their initial mutual support of the Confederacy. *Plain Folk in a Rich Man's War,* by David Williams, Teresa Crisp, and David Carlson, also looked at Georgia and showed that, just as in southwestern Virginia, the loyalty of the poor was not reliable. Margaret Storey looked at southern dissent and unionism in Alabama in *Loyalty and Loss*, demonstrating how Alabama's Unionists had to rely on traditional kin networks to survive. The guerrilla war in Arkansas was particularly brutal and unmanageable, and Daniel Sutherland and Anne Bailey compiled an excellent collection of essays that illustrate this in *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders*. The legacy of bitterness the conflict left plagued the state long after the war ended.[31]

Southwest Virginia and eastern Kentucky were particularly ignored until Brian McKnight took steps to correct that oversight in 2006. In *Contested Borderland: The Civil War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia,* he looked at how the geography of the area helped to dictate the course of the war, and how in every community that saw organized forces, a great conflict arose between the accomplishment of military goals and the maintenance of civilian life. For four years the border between Kentucky and Virginia was no-man's land, where soldiers from both armies passed through looking for food or patrolling the area. As deserters congregated in bands and used the mountains to conceal themselves, they frequently turned their military training on civilians to survive, which added to the instability of the region. The region itself was

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[31] Groce, *Mountain Rebels*, xiv; Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," 18.

largely pro-Confederate, but many of the men who lived in contested areas remained at home to fight the war in their own way, often turning to bushwhacking tactics to protect their families.[32]

Kenneth Noe also contributed to the historiography of guerrilla warfare in Virginia and in Appalachia during the Civil War. He studied county and state records for his detailed "Who Were the Bushwhackers? Age, Class, Kin, and Western Virginia's Confederate Guerrillas, 1861-1862," and discovered that the average age of bushwhackers early in the war was quite a bit older than the average age of enlisted soldiers. He also dispelled the myth that guerrillas were mostly from the lower classes, demonstrating that many came from successful backgrounds and were leaders in their communities. He suggested the centrality of kin and neighborhood in the making of a guerrilla.[33]

While some work, then, has been done on western Virginia, an opening exists for further study. West Virginia has received attention with its recent sesquicentennial celebration, but that focus has been exclusively on the counties that comprise that state and not on western Virginia as a whole. Noe noted that one shortcoming in recent studies was the lack of coverage in some areas, including western Virginia where "more can and should be done." Mackey called Virginia a "suitable study for evaluating the irregular warfare," while Mountcastle agreed because "Virginia served as the focal point for the culmination of three years of anger, frustration, and hardened federal attitudes." Edward L. Ayers believed that studies of guerrilla warfare in Virginia "could be multiplied many times over and still not exhaust the stories to be told."[34]

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[32] McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 2-4, 29, 35.

[33] Kenneth W. Noe, "Who Were the Bushwhackers? Age, Class, Kin, and Western Virginia's Confederate Guerrillas, 1861-1862," *Civil War History* 49:1 (Mar. 2003): 17-21.

[34] Kenneth W. Noe, "Appalachia Before Mr. Peabody: Some Recent Literature on the Southern Mountain Region," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 110:1 (2002): 29; Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 21; Mountcastle, *Punitive War*, 104; Edward L. Ayers, "Virginia History as Southern History: The Nineteenth Century," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 104:1 (Winter 1996): 134.

A consideration of the nature of the guerrilla war in the entirety of western Virginia as it was in 1861 must include clearer divisions within irregular warfare. The standard approach to differentiate guerrilla fighters solely by the tactics they employed as raiders, rangers, or marauders, while a good start, is rather simplistic. The final people's war category is still too large to be entirely helpful. In his definition of irregular warfare, Mark Grimsley tried to break that category into two. The first he described as "politicized civilians who fought covertly, masquerading as noncombatants," while his final category contained the outlaws who used the war as "an excuse to indulge in mayhem." He pointed out that to add to the confusion, individual guerrillas themselves drifted between the groups.[35]

While Grimsley's categorization creates a better distinction between guerrilla fighters, the problem still remains that these categories only try to address the type of warfare irregulars engaged in while ignoring the nuances that exist within a guerrilla war.[36] It does not distinguish between the hostilities aimed against outside invaders and the violence neighbors perpetrated against each other. The typical categories also do not incorporate the bands that engaged in standard "guerrilla" activities, such as stealing or killing, solely for self-defensive or survival purposes.

The existing categories of raiding warfare, partisan warfare, and the people's war also present the opportunity to generalize for clarity when in reality the guerrilla war was very messy.

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[35] Grimsley, *Hard Hand of War*, 111.

[36] In his historiographic article about the guerrilla conflict in the Civil War, Daniel Sutherland notes how scholars are beginning to appreciate the difference between guerrilla warfare and the guerrilla war. The first deals with military tactics, operations, and the organization of guerrillas, while the latter measures broader social themes and the impact of this type of warfare on civilians and their communities (see Sutherland, "Sideshow No Longer," 16). However, the typical three-way division of irregulars into the raiding/partisan/guerrilla warfare has not yet caught up with this distinction, since it focuses solely on military operations the bands engaged in without considering their impact or relationship with local communities.

In *The Uncivil War,* Mackey argued that Arkansas had "a guerrilla war of the 'people's war' model," compared to "the organized partisan war in Virginia and the raiding war in Tennessee and Kentucky." These simplistic generalizations look only at some of the most famous guerrillas in those areas, and lose sight of the prevalence of all types of guerrilla warfare throughout the Confederacy and how involved many southern civilians became in the conflict.

The true "people's war" occurred wherever people's way of life was threatened. When the Federal cavalry raided Wytheville in Wythe County, Virginia, in July 1863, the people of the town grabbed their guns and engaged them. In December 1864, West Virginia Governor Arthur Boreman called on loyal citizens to rise up and form vigilante bands to hunt down and kill the "outlaws" who had "thrown themselves outside of all rules or laws, military or civil for the government of society." He turned to civilians to restore peace and order to the state because "on account of the great numbers of these banditti, and the fact that they always go armed, it is impossible for the civil officers to arrest or the civil courts to punish them. Indeed, all the prisons in the state would hold but a small part of them." Additionally, Boreman claimed that military forces could not successfully "rid the country of them" because they operated in such small bands; therefore, he "earnestly" recommended "the loyal people…organize themselves into Companies…for the purpose of hunting down and capturing or killing these outlaws wherever they may be found." Irregular warfare in Virginia, especially western Virginia, then, was much more than a partisan affair; it incorporated more than just government-recognized groups, those who fought covertly, or those who simply wished to indulge in mayhem.[37]

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[37] Arthur Boreman, "Address to the People of West Virginia," December 23, 1864, Boreman Papers, Box 1, West Virginia, Secretary of State, 1961-1867, Archives and History Library, Special Collections, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia (WVA); Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 23; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 245.

An analysis of motives rather than tactics provides a clearer definition of irregular warfare and aligns more closely with the nuances that existed within the people's war in western Virginia. Studying guerrillas according to why they fought rather than how they did so explains how guerrilla warfare became so prevalent and why politicians and organized troops could not easily answer or control it. Some of the same types of fighters—raiders, partisans, bushwhackers, deserters, bandits, etc.—fought for different motivations. Additionally, some Confederate and Union sympathizers who engaged in guerrilla warfare were not willing participants. Examining motives and goals is especially important when looking at western Virginia, since the area had a population divided between Unionists and secessionists as well as a landscape that offered shelter for those who needed a place to hide.

Overall, irregulars in western Virginia were motivated by at least three things. One motivation, a driving factor for fighters from all three historical categories, was the opportunity to assist in military strategy for a political cause. Both raiders and partisans, who at least answered to their government in name, if not always in practice, fought for this reason, as did those bands of bushwhackers who targeted enemy soldiers or supply lines. These were often the bands that sympathetic civilians referred to as "guerrillas" rather than "bushwhackers." Those who desired to assist the organized war effort in western Virginia derailed trains, attacked foraging parties, and generally threatened the efficient conduct of military operations. This option appealed to many patriotic mountaineers who wanted to both assist their cause and remain present at home to defend and provide for their families. Home guards, considered the final line of defense for communities and towns, also fall under this category and prove once again how the war in nature was a people's war. Members of the home guard lived at home in the

community and mustered when invading armies or guerrilla bands threatened their town. However, some also engaged in guerrilla tactics and threatened civilians during missions to hunt down deserters or draft-evaders. Sometimes home guards further complicated things by engaging in activities beyond their job description, turning to bushwhacking and becoming part of the problem. In western Virginia, some of the most active irregular fighters who fought for the war effort were Capt. John McNeill around the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Gen. John Imboden in cavalry raids throughout the area, and the Moccasin Rangers around Lewisburg in Greenbrier County.
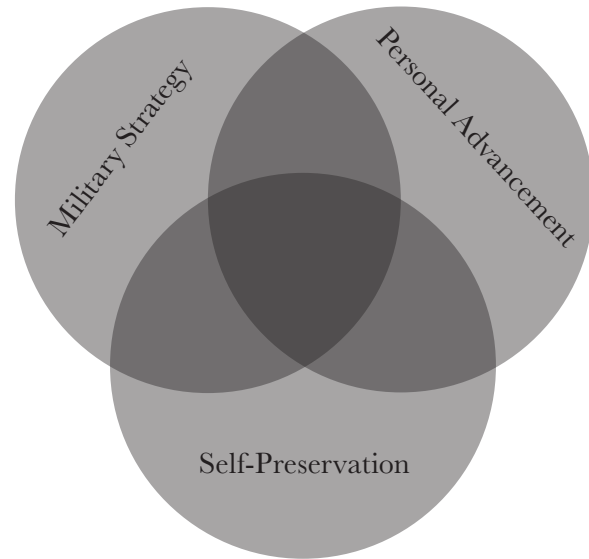
Guerrillas were also motivated by personal reasons, including spite, revenge, or the opportunity for advancement. These guerrillas implemented their own law and killed with little concern for cause or political alliances. They took advantage of the chaos of war to prey on their neighbors, looking to exact revenge for old disagreements or gain power and wealth through illegal means. While civilians often grew annoyed at military-motivated guerrillas who lived off the land and took their supplies, they held guerrillas who fought for spite, such as Hernden's band in the Kanawha Valley, Bill Pierson in Braxton County and Burleson's rangers in Scott County, in terror.

Finally, there were those who fought for self-preservation. Often these desired only to be left alone but were forced to embrace guerrilla tactics to survive. They stole food or robbed houses to gain the materials they needed for survival, and killed if they were hunted down or attacked. This included deserters from both armies, draft-evaders, and Unionists or secessionists who lived in areas not sympathetic to their beliefs. The most successful band of deserters in western Virginia lived in Floyd County, and they not only managed to survive and evade capture,

but also united with Unionists in the county to wrest control away from the Confederate sympathizers and declare independence from Virginia.

This categorization system could benefit guerrilla warfare studies by dividing irregular fighters according to their types of involvement rather than simply according to the tactics they used. It can be applied to both Unionist and

Any categorization of a topic as messy as guerrilla warfare will naturally result in some overlap. While three distinct motivations for guerrilla warfare existed in western Virginia, some guerrillas saw their motivations change as the war progressed while others fought with multiple motivations simultaneously. An understanding of this overlap is essential in any study of guerrilla warfare.

secessionist guerrillas who congregated in bands throughout western Virginia to fight outside invaders as well as intimidate their neighbors. Their reasons and methods varied little—only their enemy was different. This system also helps to explain why the official governmental responses for dealing with guerrillas so often failed. Because they failed to differentiate between irregular fighters who fought for military aims, personal greed, and self preservation, the governments attempted to respond to each using the same methods, and were therefore unsuccessful in controlling any of them. The Union army, especially, implemented a system of reprisals on civilians in response to the lingering guerrilla war they could not effectively control, which meant that civilians suffered at the hands of both bushwhackers and the regular army. The historiography debates to what extent the civilian suffering was on account of guerrillas and how much of it was a natural consequence of war, but no doubt exists that civilians suffered greatly

from irregular warfare.[38]

Western Virginia guerrillas and their impact on their communities are best considered according to their motives for involvement. Many fighters who involved themselves in the irregular war to assist the broader war effort desired only to fight the enemy. Other guerrillas used irregular war tactics for personal advancement and implemented terror over former neighbors. Finally, some groups included the more unwilling participants who were forced to become involved for self-preservation and fought any who threatened their families or their lives. All of these groups require explanations about which types of irregular fighters they included, what those fighters' motivations and goals were, how the Union and Confederate governments responded to them, and how effective their methods were according to what they hoped to achieve. As in other areas of Appalachia, Virginia mountaineers placed high value on family and put local concerns over state or national concerns, and how guerrilla warfare was conducted in the area was a direct result of those customs.

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[38] For more information about the creation of the state of West Virginia and political measures that impacted that, including why the state line was drawn where it was, a number of excellent histories exist that detail that process. Otis K. Rice and Stephen W. Brown's *West Virginia, A History* has especially garnered scholarly accolades for its clarity on the subject.

CHAPTER I
Family and Cause: Guerrillas Who Fought for Military Strategy

The most sophisticated and organized type of guerrilla warfare was conducted by those

who became involved to assist the military and political strategy of the rivaling state or national

governments. These participants fought under different labels, but the reason for their

involvement dictated their motivations and goals, and defined their effectiveness. The

governments' lack of understanding of the reasons behind their participation resulted in measures

that were never fully successful. These guerrillas included cavalry raiders, partisan rangers, some

bushwhackers, and members of home guards. Three factors motivated these guerrillas to fight.

First, they desired to defend their communities and stay close to home and their loved ones.

Second, they hoped to contribute to the larger cause on their own terms. Finally, those who

fought as partisan rangers also saw guerrilla warfare as a potentially lucrative opportunity.

Their actions took on four main goals. They looked to assault military targets such as

railroads and steamboats, impede the progress of advancing armies, attack political opponents to

undermine civilian support for their enemies, and do whatever they could to impact, either

negatively or positively, West Virginia's establishment as a new state. The Confederate

government tried to regulate their own sympathetic guerrillas while taking a harsh stance against

those who supported the Union. To try to bring peace to the turbulent area under their control,

Union commanders implemented harsh reprisals against Confederate guerrillas and encouraged

Unionists to turn to guerrilla warfare to help counter them. While these guerrillas had little

impact when they tried to operate against much larger armies, Confederate guerrillas did succeed

in forcing the Union to keep much greater numbers of troops in the areas than federal officials

would have preferred. Similarly on a large scale, Union guerrillas were instrumental in helping

the northwestern counties successfully establish the state of West Virginia.

Geography and resources played a key role in guerrilla warfare in western Virginia. When

Virginia seceded from the Union in 1861, federal officials immediately developed plans to

invade the state. They viewed western Virginia as a possible gateway to the James River Valley,

which offered an early invasion route into the rest of Virginia, and they took steps accordingly to

try to control it. The Confederate government also recognized the strategic importance of the

area, and sent troops under orders to secure the area's resources and answer the unionism

sentiment present in the northwestern most counties. While not a big industry yet, coal mining

had developed in the northern counties and government officials recognized the vast amount of

coal the mountains held.[1]

The southern counties had valuable salt and lead works, and provided access to Kentucky

through the Cumberland Gap. The saltworks at Saltville had been producing salt since 1788, and

were one of only five places in the Confederacy with salt-producing capability. It was so vast

that it produced over 300,000 bushels in 1863, but by that time it was one of only two salt

operations left under Confederate control. By 1864 it was producing nearly four million bushels,

more than the railroad could transport. Such production made it an attractive target for the Union

and vitally important for the Confederacy. Salt was necessary not only to preserve food for the

army, but also for preserving hides in leather making and in making various medicines. The

mineral also affected the health of livestock, as a hoof and tongue disease among Robert E. Lee's

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[1] Reynolds, "A Pragmatic Loyalty," 8.

cavalry horses in 1862 was attributed possibly to a lack of salt.[2]

The lead mines in Wythe County were also a concern to the Confederate authorities, since they were the only source of lead in the South. The mines produced over 60,000 pounds of lead each month and were critical to the Confederacy's ammunition production. Iron works and foundries in several southwestern towns added to the area's value, since the South had to rely on its own resources to repair rails, make cannons, and produce armor for ironclad ships. Southwestern Virginia also had the capability to grow a surplus of wheat, rye, corn, oats, and potatoes, while the West Virginia counties were America's most important wool production center east of the Mississippi River. As historian James Robertson notes, southwestern Virginia's contribution to the Confederacy was as much material as it was manpower.[3]

Western Virginia also held two strategic railroad lines. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, along the region's northern border, was vital to the Union army's supply lines, as was the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad in southwestern Virginia to the Confederacy. Due to their importance, both lines remained continuous targets of guerrilla warfare and cavalry raids throughout the duration of the conflict.

The northwestern portion of Virginia fell quickly, as Union troops defeated the Confederates in 1861 at Philippi and Rich Mountain on June 3 and July 11, respectively. These victories in the Monongahela Valley and the Confederates' inability to do anything further except conduct sporadic raids to the region allowed the Reorganized Government of Virginia to form,

[2] Walker, *War in Southwest Virginia*, 10; Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy, Division of Mineral Resources, "Geology and the Civil War in Southwestern Virginia: The Smyth County Salt Works" by Robert C. Whisonant, *Virginia Minerals* 42:3 (August 1996): 26.

[3] Walker, *War in Southwest Virginia*, 8-9, 21; Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy, "Geology and the Civil War in Southwestern Virginia," 26; James I. Robertson, Jr. ed., *Civil War Letters of Sheffey* (Baton Rogue: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 1.

which led to the eventual creation of the state of West Virginia. Although the Confederacy enjoyed great sympathy in the Kanawha Valley, mismanagement and ineptness by Confederate commanders Henry A. Wise and John B. Floyd soon led to a Confederate retreat from the Valley, as well. Confederate Virginia Governor John Letcher sent Robert E. Lee to the area to regain the lost territory, but Lee's efforts failed badly. By 1862, guerrillas conducted most of the fighting in the area and dominated it for the remainder of the war.[4]

Although the organized armies had conducted campaigns in the region at the beginning of hostilities, local residents had not shied away from also getting involved. By the time Union General George McClellan received his first assignment of the war in western Virginia, one Union newspaper referred to his responsibilities there as "guerrilla duty." Throughout the trans-Allegheny region, battles over the state's firearms broke out. In Parkersville, Unionists and secessionists exchanged gunfire over muskets to arm a home guard company. In Sisterville, a group of secessionists succeeded in gaining control over the town's muskets, but Unionists secured two cannons. Additionally, calls from across the state began for the people to assist in their own defense. Letcher appealed to western Virginians to do their "patriotic duty" and organize partisan bands to defend themselves. An advertisement in the *Kanawha Valley Star* in April 1861 boasted that since western Virginian men were accustomed to bearing arms since youth, if "the abolitionists of Ohio send an invading army into Western Virginia, not a soldier among them will ever return alive. The mountain boys will shoot them down as dogs."[5]

While Union commanders ceased to believe western Virginia held a good invasion route

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[4] William Blair, *Virginia's Private War, Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 35; Rice, *West Virginia*, 126-127.

[5] *Harper's Weekly*, June 21, 1862, 3; Rice, *West Virginia,* 124; *Richmond Whig*, April 29, 1862; McKinney, *Fayette County*, 14.

to the rest of the state by 1863 and no longer considered it important to their military strategy,

mountaineers who desired to contribute to a political cause continued to attack military targets.

They aligned themselves with Union or Confederate government-sanctioned raiders to conduct

the most organized guerrilla warfare with raids against mines and railroads. Brig. Gens. Albert G.

Jenkins, William E. Jones, and John D. Imboden led the most organized raids for the

Confederacy in western Virginia, while Brig. Gens. William W. Averell, George Crook, Stephen

Burbridge, and Col. Maj. Gen. George Stoneman did the same for the Union.[6]

Although Jenkins was a commissioned officer in the Confederate army, Union soldiers

routinely referred to the men who fought under him as "Jenkins' guerrillas," and he became the

region's most feared irregular fighter, since he had the freedom to strike wherever and whenever

he desired. In October 1862, the *New York Herald* reported that Jenkins' men were the only

"rebels" left in the Little Kanawha Valley, although their calculations failed to take civilians into

account. Born in 1830 in Cabell County, Virginia, Jenkins was educated at Harvard and prior to

the war served as a United States Congressman. Once the war began in 1861, he focused his

actions in western Virginia on terrorizing Unionists and threatening neighboring communities in

Ohio. By 1862, Union commanders were forced to assign as many as 4,800 men to protect

telegraph lines, railroad bridges, and tunnels against the threat of Jenkins' men. The protection of

these military targets, however, meant that federal soldiers could no longer effectively protect as

many neighborhoods, leaving many Unionists to feel as though the army abandoned them.[7]

Jenkins' most notorious raid occurred in late summer 1862. He added home guards and

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[6] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 161; Rice, *West Virginia*, 135-135.
[7] *New York Herald*, October 18, 1862, 1; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 32; *Memphis Daily Appeal*, September 11, 1862, 2; "GUERRILLAS IN WESTERN VIRGINIA, Capture and Recapture of Point Pleasant Rebel Loss 12 Killed and 14 Prisoners," *New York Times*, April 1, 1863.

guerrillas to his regular cavalry troops and journeyed 500 miles through northwestern Virginia

and into Ohio. As Union militia and guerrillas responded as best as they could, Jenkins' men

captured prisoners and munitions, caused Unionists to live in a state of fear, and proved that the

Union's grasp on northwestern Virginia was not impenetrable. Jenkins continued his raids into

northwestern Virginia and offered what defense he could to Confederate-held southwest Virginia

until he was killed in the Battle of Cloyd's Mountain on May 21, 1864.[8]

With impending West Virginia statehood in 1863, Confederate leaders made one final

effort to block it by increasing their presence east of the Allegheny Mountains. In April, Imboden

and Jones launched separate yet concurrent raids into the Little Kanawha Valley, hoping to reach

the B&O and and destroy all of the bridges and trestles between Oakland and Grafton. They also

sought to defeat Union detachments in towns along the railroad, enlist secessionists into the

Confederate army, and harass the Reorganized Government by influencing the May elections. On

April 29, Imboden, a native of Lewis County, reached Fairmont. He demolished an important

railroad bridge and burned Virginia (USA) Governor Francis Pierpont's private library, after

which his raiders purportedly dragged half-burnt books, including the family Bible, through the

streets.[9]

The Jones-Imboden Raid proved successful. The raiders destroyed Union barracks,

blockhouses, railroad structures, and the oilfield equipment in Burning Springs in Wirt County

along with an estimated 150,000 barrels of crude oil. Their actions benefitted the organized

military, and many of the horses, cattle, and supplies they captured were sent to the Army of

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[8] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 161; H. E. Matheny, *Wood County, West Virginia, in Civil War Times, With an Account of the Guerrilla Warfare in the Little Kanawha Valley* (Parkersburg, WV: Trans-Allegheny Books, Inc., 1987), 275-276.

[9] Rice, *West Virginia*, 136-138; "Recollection by Mrs. M. M. Eaton," Scrapbook, Lewis County, ca. 1910s, WVA.

Northern Virginia and used in its Pennsylvania campaign. Despite the success of their raid, Jones and Imboden were unable to derail the drive toward statehood for West Virginia.[10]

Bands of local guerrillas and partisan rangers assisted Jones, Imboden, and other raiders in their forays into enemy territory, and then remained in the area after the raids. Capt. John McNeil, who operated in Hardy County, led one of the most successful partisan bands in the Confederacy and accompanied Jones on his 1863 raid, cutting telegraph wires and destroying bridges at Oakland. Later, he and Imboden raided a Union camp in Hardy County at sunrise, capturing 150 men and 12 wagons at a cost of only two of their men badly wounded. McNeill's success as a partisan extended well beyond his assistance to cavalry raiders, however. Operating over one hundred miles away from any Confederate-controlled area, he rendered more effective service than any other partisan group in either army except for the Confederate John S. Mosby, who operated in northern Virginia against the Army of the Potomac's supply lines.[11]

McNeill based his headquarters at Old Fields in his family's home and focused his objectives on attacking the B&O and foraging for beef cattle for the Confederate armies in the Shenandoah Valley. After he was mortally wounded in a raid on October 3, 1864, his son, Jesse, took over the leadership of the band, and, in February 1865, conducted the band's most famous exploit when, in a well-planned scheme, McNeill's Rangers captured Union Brig. Gen. Benjamin Kelley and Maj. Gen. George Crook from their headquarters in Cumberland, Maryland. The two were then delivered to Lieut. Gen. Jubal Early, who transported them to Richmond where they

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[10] Matheny, *Wood County*, 331-339.

[11] Festus P. Summer, *Baltimore and Ohio in the Civil War* (Gettysburg, PA: Stan Clark Military Books, 1992), 128; Rebecca Van Meter, September 11, 1863, Van Meter Diary, WVA; Simeon Miller Bright, "The McNeill Rangers: A Study in Confederate Guerrilla Warfare," *West Virginia History* 12:4 (July 1951): 339-353.

were held as prisoners of war.[12]

For the duration of their operation, the McNeill Rangers forced the Union to divert an estimated 25,000 troops from the front lines to guard the B&O, and they captured around 40 prisoners for every man listed on the roster. Rebecca Van Meter, a secessionist from Hardy County, recorded in her diary a personal perspective of the Rangers' effectiveness in the area throughout 1863. On January 8, she wrote that the federal troops were "awfully afraid" of McNeill. On April 7, she noted that Union troops were pouring into town because McNeill had captured some Union wagons and that was "what started them all up here after them." In August that year the federal cavalry was back, but were once again foiled by McNeill's actions. The riders came "roving in every direction after horses & Cattle, they are like mad Men, full of venom at what we have been destroying in Pennsylvania and Western V. …Capt McNeill bushwhacked them as they come into town on the Wardensville road[. He] killed a few & wounded some took some of them prisoners, & released several of our Citizens they had captured at Howerdslick."[13]

Local roots and success against the Union army won the rangers the support of their neighbors. Van Meter recorded that the neighborhood "bake[d] them bread as much as they can," and the men hurriedly ate with the civilians before they set out on their raids. Her admiration for the band was obvious in the weeks following one of their attacks on a Union supply wagon train when she wrote, "They are on dangerous ground, but it seems they are a terror to the Yankeys,

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[12] Michael J. Pauley, *Unreconstructed Rebel, The Life of General John McCausland, C.S.A.* (Charleston, WV: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1993), 65; Russ McClelland, "'We Were Enemies': Pennsylvanians and Virginia Guerrillas," *Civil War Times Illustrated* (Dec. 1983): 44; Roger U. Delauter, Jr., *McNeill's Rangers* (Lynchburg, VA: H.E. Howard, 1986), 102-104.
[13] Bright, "The McNeill Rangers," 565; Rebecca Van Meter, January 8, 1863, April 7, 1863, August 1, 1863, Van Meter Diary, WVA.

they have not been back since with their trains as they said they would be." Despite the danger from federal pursuers, McNeill's band continued to operate in the same region for the rest of the war. One month after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, McNeill's Rangers surrendered to Union troops under Gen. Rutherford B. Hayes, ending the last remaining organized Confederate presence in western Virginia.[14]

As the Confederate raiders and rangers operated in northwestern Virginia, their Union counterparts did the same in the south. After the battle of Gettysburg, the federal high command ordered the first raid against the salt mines at Saltville. Raiders under Col. John Toland became involved in a skirmish in Tazewell County and feared it would alert the defenders in Saltville of their presence; therefore, Toland raided Wytheville instead, where he was killed. Two months later a second Union force ventured within 35 miles of Saltville but retreated after a brief skirmish. In November 1863, Brig. Gen. Averell embarked on a raid against the V&T Railroad. When he reached Pocahontas County he encountered a Confederate brigade under Brig. Gen. John Echols. In a battle at Droop Mountain, Averell defeated the southern force, but when he reunited with a second Union column under Brig. Gen. Alfred Napoleon Duffié the following day in Lewisburg, they recognized their troops were in no condition to continue the raid and retreated back to Union lines.[15]

In May 1864, Averell attempted a second raid against Saltville, this time with Gen. Crook. As Crook destroyed the Long Bridge over the New River at Central, Averell headed to Saltville but once again failed in his objective when he learned that Confederate Gen. John Hunt

[14] Rebecca Van Meter, November 8, 1863, Van Meter Diary, WVA.
[15] Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy, "Geology and the Civil War in Southwestern Virginia," 27.

Morgan was in charge of the defense there. Averell, too, turned his attention on Wytheville, but Morgan caught up to him north of the town and forced the Union troops to retreat before they could inflict damage on the area. After the inconclusive Crook-Averell Raid, the Union army did not attempt another raid into the area for five months, when Brig. Gen. Stephen Burbridge once again headed for Saltville. He made it to Smyth County where a makeshift force delayed him at Clinch Mountain. Burbridge attacked Confederate troops outside of Saltville and retreated without accomplishing his objective after two days of fighting. He left his wounded on the field, where southern soldiers and the guerrillas who had joined them reportedly systematically murdered several hundred of Burbridge's black soldiers. The clear southern victory kept the salt works safe for another couple of months.[16]

A final Union raid under Maj. Gen. Stoneman in December 1864 resulted in the Second Battle of Saltville. After the Confederate defenders were forced to retreat when they ran out of ammunition, Union forces were finally able to disable the salt works. Stoneman's raiders also destroyed key lead mines, leadworks, and salt ponds around Marion. Despite the measures his men took, they failed to permanently destroy the works. Southerners were able to rescue several furnaces and continue limited salt production until the following spring, when Stoneman retuned and completely destroyed the mines.[17]

As cavalry raiders and partisans conducted their actions, other bands across western Virginia also formed to meet the enemy. These guerrilla bands never received official recognition

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[16] Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy, "Geology and the Civil War in Southwestern Virginia," 27; Richard B. Drake, *History of Appalachia* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 101-102; B. H. Hibbas, October 20, 1864, Hibbas Letter, Library of Virginia, Special Collections, Richmond, Virginia (LVA).

[17] Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy, "Geology and the Civil War in Southwestern Virginia," 28.

from established governments. They engaged in the most crude type of warfare of all fighters

who fought for military aims, but they viewed themselves as essential to the cause. As one

historian noted, "Had conventional armies never entered this border region, its people would still

have waged a guerrilla war against each other." The Moccasin Rangers were the most notorious

of this group, and they kept the Little Kanawha Valley loyal to the Confederacy long after West

Virginia was admitted into the Union as a loyal state. They mustered at the beginning of the war

as a band of about 200 men under the leadership of Perry Connolly, and they quickly became a

target for Union soldiers. Originally a home guard unit, some of the more cautious leaders

resigned when the group began terrorizing defenseless Unionists. The company then divided,

although both groups kept the name and remained fierce foes. The name soon became a general

term for all Confederate guerrillas in western Virginia, although some bands retained it as their

official label. The Rangers who stayed with Connolly developed a murderous streak and saw

civilian Unionists equal targets to Union troops. Some members of the group used the

opportunity to settle old scores against their Unionist neighbors, which shows how even within

the same band of guerrillas, different motivations for fighting overlapped, making guerrilla

warfare a truly chaotic entity.[18]

Those whom the Moccasin Rangers captured received a fierce and swift end. A

correspondent from Lewisburg in Greenbrier County reported in March 1862 that "woe be upon

[Union soldiers] if they fall into their clutches," since the Moccasin Rangers took no prisoners,

but instead took "them into the woods and turn them loose, so to say." One contemporary

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[18] *The Daily Dispatch*, March 22, 1862, 1; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 31; Daniel E. Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare, Democracy, and the Fate of the Confederacy," *The Journal of Southern History* 68:2 (May 2002): 272; Richard O. Curry and F. Gerald Ham, "The Bushwhackers' War: Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in West Virginia," *Civil War History* 10:4 (Dec. 1964): 420; Matheny, *Wood County*, 47.

described Connolly as "the most cruel and bloodthirsty of all guerrilla Captains…[who was] revengeful and never forgot an insult." Connolly's equally aggressive girlfriend, Nancy Hart, soon joined and rode with him at the head of the band. They made rules together and enforced them, and soon their Moccasins became an efficient spy and scout operation. In the late fall 1861, Union soldiers captured Hart, who played innocent and was soon released. She passed on to Connolly all she had learned about the Union army while in prison, and he relayed it to the Confederate army. As that year came to an end, some Moccasin Rangers remained in the Little Kanawha Valley, while Connolly and Hart ventured into the neighboring counties of Braxton, Webster, Nicholas, and Summers. By that winter the Moccasins had secured control of Calhoun County and destroyed all of the Union mail that was intended for Calhoun and Roane Counties. Because many of the locals gave them little sympathy, they began looting for survival. They knew that while they considered themselves Confederate soldiers, the Union considered them outlaws and would shoot them if caught.[19]

Capt. John Baggs organized a Unionist home guard named the Snake Hunters in August 1861 to challenge the Moccasins. They were from the same mountain stock as the Moccasins, daring with a thorough knowledge of the local terrain and a great familiarity with weapons. The Union army also recruited a company from Parkersburg to track down the Moccasins, and in early 1862 that company captured several ranger leaders, executing many and putting the others on trial where they received long prison terms. They soon tracked down Connolly, beat him to death with their rifle butts and confiscated the livestock of the family where he was found. For good measure they burned the family's house, as well. Hart had not been in camp at the time, and

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[19] *The Daily Dispatch*, March 22, 1862, 1; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict,* 31; Matheny, *Wood County*, 48-53, 211.

her subsequent actions can only be traced by legend, which claims she continued her bushwhacking ways through the end of the war.[20]

While Connolly and Hart gained infamy in the central region of western Virginia, notorious Confederate guerrilla Champ Ferguson made his presence felt in the western and southernmost counties. Although he spent much of the war in the mountains of Kentucky and Tennessee, he freely crossed the Virginia state line on several occasions to carry out his operations. He joined Confederate troops for the defense of Smyth County during the First Battle of Saltville. When the Confederates began killing the wounded Union raiders that had been left on the battlefield, Ferguson claimed that he personally killed fourteen of them before the ranking Confederate general in the area, John Breckinridge, heard about the atrocities and ordered that the massacre stop. Ferguson boasted that he killed over 100 Union soldiers and Unionists during the war, but his actions did not always win him the support of the Confederacy. In early 1865, Confederate authorities imprisoned him for two months in Wytheville, Virginia, accusing him of murdering a government official. However, they released him after the charge could not be proven. After the war, Federal government officials tried Ferguson for war crimes, found guilty, and sentenced to hang. His execution on October 20, 1865 in Nashville, Tennessee, made him one of only two Confederates to be convicted and executed for war crimes. The other was Capt. Henry Wirz, the commandant of Andersonville prison in Georgia.[21]

Although some individual guerrillas rose to infamy in western Virginia, many guerrilla bands that fought to assist a political cause never had a single, standout leader, and in some areas

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[20] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 31, 89; Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 421; Randall Osborne and Jeffrey C. Weaver, *The Virginia State Rangers and State Line* (Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, 1994), 7-10.

[21] John S. Witcher, February 22, 1864, Whaley Papers, Section 1, VHS; Thurman Sensing, *Champ Ferguson: Confederate Guerrilla* (Nashville: TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994), 212; Drake, *A History of Appalachia*, 101-102.

the war was localized to the extreme. Pendleton County, for example, experienced its own civil war. The county's weak civil power left room for private grudges to grow into physical clashes in a divided community. The tension led to bushwhacking, burning, and pillaging, and some residents found it safer to sleep hidden in the woods than in a house. A band of southern guerrillas called the Dixie Boys formed in response to the establishment of the Swamp Dragons, which secessionists scoffed at as nothing more than a "band of Union land pirates." The Swamp Dragons were a home guard unit that were, in effect, Federal auxiliaries. At the beginning of the war they engaged both the Dixie Boys and Confederate troops. A Confederate soldier reported in a letter on January 10, 1862 that the Dragons and Dixie Boys had gotten into a fight the day before. Eight Dragons and two Dixie Boys were killed, with three wounded. That action put the Confederate troops in the area on guard. Three days later, after the Dragons killed a southern guide, a Confederate unit attacked them and killed two, wounding eight. The Dragons continued to operate in the county, even after it was securely under Union control. In early 1864 southern newspapers reported that they robbed and treated secessionists in Hardy and Pendleton Counties harshly, and that they continued to engage pro-Confederate bands in skirmishes.[22]

Other home guards joined raiders, rangers, and some guerrillas in participating in irregular warfare for primarily defensive purposes, as well. These guards, which contributed to the overall military strategy when possible, mobilized most frequently as local militias for the first line of defense for counties throughout western Virginia. Both the Union and Confederate governments organized home guards in the areas under their control, but the two sides had

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[22] Joseph Hubbard Wilson to My Dear Mother, January 10, 1862 and January 15, 1862, Joseph Hubbard Wilson Papers, VHS; Oren Frederic Morton, *A History of Pendleton County, West Virginia* (Franklin, WV: Privately Published, 1910), 110; *Staunton Vindicator*, January 12, 1864, 1; *Macon Daily Telegraph*, February 11, 1864, 1.

different missions. Union guerrillas were typically called home guards, while the Confederate

home guards largely left guerrilla warfare to the partisans and functioned primarily as a civilian

guard against depredations by enemy soldiers. Confederate home guards usually only mustered

for police duty or when emergencies arose near their homes, similar to the modern National

Guard; Union home guards typically remained in bands and operated offensively when no need

for defensive measures existed. Many home guards remained active through the duration of the

war, although in early 1864 the government of newly-formed West Virginia discussed disbanding

the guards for budgetary reasons. However, fear that removal of the Union home guards would

make Unionists feel unsafe and flee areas that held strong secessionist sentiment caused the

government to never implement the idea. West Virginia's control in those areas was already

shaky and a Unionist exodus would spell disaster for the new state.[23]

In 1862, the Confederate Virginia Government in Richmond passed the Home Guard Act

to provide organized defenses for towns in Virginia, help increase the state's military power, and

control local slave populations. The Act stipulated that the Guards could not operate outside of

the state or stay on duty for more than 30 days at a time. They had to furnish their own guns, but

the state agreed to provide food and ammunition. Many of the participants were too young or old

to fight in the regular army, although partially disabled veterans and soldiers convalescing or on

leave occasionally lent a hand in an emergency. The Washington County Home Guard remained

alert for potential threats to come from Tennessee, while the one in Scott County kept pickets

along the Big Sandy River to sound the alert against any invading forces.[24]

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[23] McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 35; Weaver, *Civil War in Buchanan and Wise Counties*, 62; William Shannon, February 6, 1864, Whaley Papers, Section 1, VHS.

[24] Walker, *War in Southwest Virginia*, 11, 62; Michael K. Shaffer, *Washington County Virginia in the Civil War* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012), 69; Robert M. Addington, *History of Scott County, Virginia* (United States: The Overmountain Press, 1992), 147.

Union home guards, on the other hand, embraced their guerrilla duties. Confederate Col. Jenkins, himself a participant in irregular warfare, called the Buckhannon Home Guard a bunch of "Lincolnite bushwhackers," while a Confederate soldier claimed that all Union home guards were simply comprised of "Union men provided with arms and equipments by Lincoln." Killen's Home Guard in Wise County became the most feared group of Union soldiers in western Virginia, operating in a predominantly Unionist area of the Confederate-controlled southern portion of the state. Alf Killen and his men sought to control the area and steal supplies. They killed their first victim in summer 1863, after they stole his horse and then ambushed him when they learned he was pursuing them to get his valuable property back. Around that same time they also imprisoned a secessionist for his views, although they were forced to release him when his Unionist brother intervened and threatened to have Killen shot. In June they bushwhacked men from the Confederate 7th Cavalry who were going through the area searching for deserters and threatening Unionists. Killen's power was broken at Cranesnest when he planned a surprise attack on 200 Confederate soldiers camped nearby. Secessionist civilians, however, alerted the troops, which permitted them to carry out their own surprise attack against the Home Guard. Although this was the largest military clash in the Sandy Basin during the war, accounts vary as to whether it occurred in November 1863 or 1864.[25]

While cavalry raiders conducted their raids under official orders, partisans, guerrillas, and home guards were involved in irregular warfare by choice. Because they chose involvement in

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[25] Report of Brig. Gen. A. G. Jenkins, September 19, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies,* Series I, XII (2),757-759; Micajah Woods to My Dear Father, December 16, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA (UVA); Weaver, *Civil War in Buchanan and Wise Counties*, 179, 212; Ralph Mann, "Family Group, Family Migration, and the Civil War in the Sandy Basin of Virginia," *Appalachian Journal* 19:4 (Summer 1992): 383-384; William Shannon, February 6, 1846, Whaley papers, Section 1, VHS.

the guerrilla war over enlisting in the organized military, their motivations and goals were unique among fighters who fought for a political cause. They were motivated by a desire to defend their homes and families, and to stay close to home while they contributed to the larger cause, the triumph of the Union or the Confederacy, on their own terms. A diarist in the Kanawha Valley illustrated this sentiment when he recorded in his diary on July 13, 1861 that as Federal troops moved up the Kanawha River, the secessionists ran "with their guns to bushwhack them." On the Union's first raid into southwestern Virginia in summer 1863, citizens grew concerned that the soldiers would destroy all of their grain, and many fired on the advancing raiders. The Union raiders, however, easily dispersed the bushwhackers.[26]

Concerns over local defense grew as lawlessness spread and guerrillas who were not concerned with national aims began to grow more prevalent. A Tazewell County resident informed the Confederate War Department that a military force was necessary to protect the county and "chastis[e] the Union bands who have become very daring, insolent, and troublesome." By the end of 1862, Confederate Gen. John B. Floyd, who had fallen from favor after several unsuccessful commands, returned to his native southwest Virginia to put together a militia for the defense of the area. His local connections and his promise that he was raising solely a defensive company rallied many remote mountaineers to his cause, several of whom had resisted the draft and refused to join any other company. Called the Virginia State Line, the company remained in existence answering only to the Adjunct General and Governor of the Commonwealth, until the Partisan Ranger Act was revoked in 1864, when it was dissolved.[27]

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[26] Civil War Diary, July 13, 1861, Blundon & Matthews Families Papers, WVA; Walker, *War in Southwest Virginia*, 43.

[27] Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare," 284; Micajah Woods to My Dear Mother, November 13, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA; Osborne and Weaver, *Virginia State Rangers and State Line*, 29.

These military-strategy guerrillas desired to contribute to a national cause on their own terms while remaining close to home. Some Confederate guerrillas trailed the Confederate army and acted as a rear guard, or operated as scouts to guide the army through territory they knew. One Confederate soldier described these friendly "Bush-Whackers" as "dressed in bark-dyed apparel with their long rifles and deer-skin pouches. Well may the Yankees fear them for they rarely draw a bead and pull a trigger without bringing a pigeon." Guerrillas on both sides often fired from the bush on advancing opposing armies, or attacked small foraging parties who were separate from the main body. One Confederate soldier wrote from a camp outside of Pocahontas County in November 1861 that they had little to do except for catching "a union man every now and then." He mentioned that one soldier had gotten shot by a Union guerrilla a few weeks previously, and they had all despaired of his life, but that the wounded man was then up and walking around. Another southerner described the challenges the army faced when scouting in the mountains, where unbroken forests offered places of concealment where bushwhackers fired on the troops from both sides. Soldiers who were forced to lag behind the main column worried for their lives.[28]

Stories abound of western Virginia mountaineers attempting to fight the war and contribute to national objectives on their own terms. One concerns Union troops who occupied the Cumberland Gap in the summer of 1864. A small group of soldiers entered Lee County, Virginia, to bathe in a nearby river. On their way back they visited some farm houses to become

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[28] James Marten, *Civil War America, Voices from the Home Front* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 57; Robertson, ed. *Civil War Letters of Sheffey*, 93; *The Charleston Mercury*, August 8, 1863, 1; Joseph Hubbard Wilson to Dear Mother, November 6, 1861, Joseph Hubbard Wilson Papers, VHS; J. B. Pendleton, June 7, 1861, Pendleton Family Papers, VHS; William Selwyn Ball, May 25, 1863, William Selwyn Ball Reminiscence, VHS; Richard R. Duncan, *Lee's Endangered Left:The Civil War in Western Virginia Spring of 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 203.

acquainted with the locals. While the rest of the company returned to camp, two of the men

lingered at one house. Although they followed their comrades only a half an hour later,

bushwhackers ambushed them. Knowing they would be shot if they surrendered, the men began

blindly shooting into the bush. They managed to kill the bushwhacker leader, but one Union

soldier was killed after being shot 11 times. The other miraculously survived five wounds when

friendly residents offered medical care after the bushwhackers had left him for dead.[29]

In September 1861 a Confederate soldier complained that Union guerrillas made western

Virginia "more dreaded than any other portions of the state." Two months later, Confederate

picket guards in Greenbrier County were shot at by a "Union man and a very little boy." The

soldiers captured the two civilians and sent them to a Confederate prison in Staunton. The

involvement of a boy young enough to receive the epithet "very little" reveals how extensively

the populace was involved in guerrilla conflict. In Wyoming County in May 1862 a band of

bushwhackers led by George Morgan killed a Union lieutenant who was scouting six miles in

advance of his company. After they shot him in the eye, immediately killing him, they stole his

sword, revolver, watch, and coat, and then turned his pockets inside out to ensure they had not

missed any valuables. Those same bushwhackers occasionally joined a Confederate cavalry unit

that summer and skirmished with the Union troops stationed in the area.[30]

In December of that year, five Unionist bushwhackers in Wise County attempted to

assassinate Confederate Maj. Samuel Salyer, who was at home on leave for a few days. Salyer's

son, a lieutenant in the 50th Va. Regiment, had fortunately stopped at his father's house on a

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[29] *The Columbus Gazette*, July 15, 1864, 2.
[30] John A. Garnett to William Gray, September 30, 1862, William Gray Papers, VHS; Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought, Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 42; Lt. Matters to Col. Lightburn Correspondence, May 10, 1862, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, RG 393, NARA.

military errand that evening, and his presence saved his father's life. Both Salyers sustained

wounds, but they killed one bushwhacker and managed to scare off the rest. These attacks

against isolated military personnel continued in western Virginia until the end of the war

wherever organized troops were present.[31]

While these guerrillas were motivated by a desire to impact the larger war while

remaining close to home, some were also driven by less noble sentiments. Partisans were only

required to turn over captured munitions to the army and were permitted to keep whatever else

they captured; therefore, some fought to gain wealth through official means. The maxim "to the

victors go the spoil" applied to these partisans, and they evenly divided captured food, household

goods, gold, or silver. In this way, they captured what they needed without having to rely on

Confederate coffers for sustenance. This lure of profit attracted many men to the life of a

partisan. The freedom to keep all they captured led to some humorous moments, as one member

of the Virginia State Line quipped after a raid against a Union boat loaded with army supplies,

that the entire cavalry force, garbed in captured Union uniforms, had not only "relieved [the

state] of a vast expense," but were "more durably clad than it is in the power of the Southern

Confederacy to accomplish."[32]

Although few scholars view these guerrillas as legitimate fighting men, the participants

themselves believed they were. Those assisting the southern cause saw themselves as

Confederate soldiers, and their Unionist counterparts considered themselves a necessary partner

to the Union army. While their goals differed according to the opportunities that existed in their

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[31] Weaver, *Civil War in Buchanan and Wise Counties,* 143; George Crook to A. N. Dueeié, October 22, 1864, *OR*, Series I, XLIII (2), 447.
[32] Weaver, *Civil War in Buchanan and Wise Counties*, 65; Micajah Woods to My Dear Father, December 16, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA.

areas of operation, generally guerrillas motivated by a desire to contribute to a political or

military cause pursued a variety of aims; they attacked military targets, tried to slow down

invading armies, attacked civilians who disagreed with them politically, and tried to either ensure

West Virginia statehood or take actions to disrupt the new state from forming, depending on their

political perspective.

For those who attacked military targets, railroads held the main appeal. From Harpers

Ferry to the Little Kanawha Valley, Confederate guerrillas maintained a constant threat to the

B&O Railroad, the primary transportation source the Union had to move supplies to their troops

fighting in the Western and Trans-Mississippi theaters. Guerrillas burned the bridge at Harpers

Ferry five times during the war, and each time it took Union engineers several weeks to construct

a makeshift replacement so that the railroad could resume its normal operations. Other bridges

along the Main Stem remained under continual harassment, financially straining the B&O

Company and forcing them to raise their rates for transporting government supplies to

compensate for the destruction. Guerrillas also loosened railroad ties in attempts to derail trains.

Several bands, including McNeill's Rangers, became very effective in their attacks on railroads.[33]

For Union guerrillas and cavalry raiders, the V&T Railroad presented a compelling

target. The line ran from Lynchburg to Chattanooga, transporting Confederate troops and

supplies to the western theater. Two bridges in particular held the potential to cripple the railroad:

the "Long Bridge" at Radford over the New River and the "High Bridge" west of Wytheville

over Reed Creek. Whenever Union raiding parties entered the area to attack the salt or lead

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[33] P. H. Sheridan to E. M. Stanton, February 26, 1865, *OR*, Series I, XLVI (2), 711-712; Freehling, *South vs. the South*, 62; Correspondence to Gen. Meigs, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Folder 1, February 25, 1863, RG 92, National Archives and Records Administration I, Washington, D.C. (NARA); Correspondence to Gen. Meigs, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Folder 3, March 3, 1863, RG 92, NARA.

mines, they always tried to disrupt the railroad in some way while they were in the area.[34]

Confederate guerrillas who lived along the Ohio River terrorized Union river boats. After some fired on and disabled the *Ben Franklin* and *Captain Jack* in the Belleville area in Wood County, the Ohio River Pilots Association threatened to suspend all river traffic south of Marietta for the safety of their pilots. The U.S. Government accelerated gunboat assembly in response, to form a fleet that could offer protection to boats transporting supplies. Union troops also patrolled the river. However, guerrillas continually harassed them. While the presence of troops discouraged guerrilla attacks against steamboats, it could never stop them completely.[35]

Guerrillas also tried to frustrate army movements whenever an army passed through a guerrilla-controlled area. This prompted many to try to attack invading armies, but only against soldiers in small groups, separate from the main body. In small numbers, guerrillas could be very effective. When the 2nd Kentucky Regiment (USA) conducted a campaign in western Virginia in March 1862, the *Louisville Daily Journal* reported that a "great many" men were killed "by the infernal bushwhackers." When federal troops tried to conduct a raid against the V&T in April 1862, inclement weather stalled them in Mercer County for two days, and they used the time to try to rid themselves of guerrillas in the area. The guerrillas were so persistent that the Union commander, future President Rutherford B. Hayes, had to keep his cavalry at the rear of his column to keep them at bay. That same month soldiers from the 30th Ohio Infantry were camped in Fayette County at McCoys Mill (present day Glen Jean), when bushwhackers attacked their pickets one night. One Union soldier wrote to his wife that 48 buckshot and two slugs had hit

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[34] Walker, *War in Southwest Virginia*, 8.
[35] Matheny, *Wood County*, 111.

their shanty but fortunately had missed the occupants within, "quite the narrow escape."[36]

Two months later Confederate partisans remained active in the county. They captured a dozen soldiers along Loup Creek, but before they could carry out their plan to burn the wharfboat, dawn came and alerted the Union soldiers on the other side of the river of their presence. As the guerrillas fled, they had to leave most of their captives and horses, but they did manage to take 15 mules from a nearby Union train. One soldier in the 91st Ohio Volunteer Infantry noted the guerrillas "are unusually active, all around us, and are showing any amount of daring."[37]

Confederate guerrillas remained active against organized forces, even as the Union army took more firm control of the counties in the newly formed West Virginia. At the first Battle of Saltville, Union Gen. Burbridge failed to receive orders to retreat because the guerrilla activity in his rear was so effective. Two other Union regiments had received and followed the orders, which meant that Burbridge faced the Confederate defenders alone the following day without the help he had anticipated. Confederate Col. Clarence Prentice, the son of the Unionist editor of the *Louisville Daily Journal,* was captured and then exchanged in May 1863 after his father's influence helped expedite his release. Prentice formed a guerrilla band and spent the remainder of the war in western Virginia, bushwhacking small groups of federal soldiers, home guards, or Unionist citizens while avoiding outright fights with them.[38]

George W. Braggs, a Union soldier stationed in southern West Virginia for the last year of the war, kept a journal that was filled with accounts of bushwhacker attacks and little else. In

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[36] *Louisville Daily Journal*, March 14, 1862, 3; Copy of a Newspaper Report, Charles Austin Goddard Papers, Section 3, VHS; McKinney, *Fayette County*, 140.
[37] McKinney, *Fayette County*, 186.
[38] Walker, *War in Southwest Virginia*, 117; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 178.

May 1864 he wrote outside of Salt Sulphur Springs, "Fired on by bushwhackers. No one was hurt, captured one of them." The following May the story remained similar. He recorded, "Left camp at 8 oclock and marched to Union, 4 miles. Reported our regiment shot bushwhacker captured last night." Three days later he followed that up with "Left camp at 8 oclock and marched about 17 miles, crossing the Greenbrier River at Alderson's Ferry. One of Co. A, 36th killed by bushwhacker."[39] June held much of the same for Braggs:

> June 1: Left camp at 6 oclock and marched to White Sulphur Springs, 14 miles. Bushwhackers fired into advance, wounding two men. Warm. Our brigade in advance.

> June 3: Marched 16 miles on road to Warm Springs. Waded Jackson's River at Woodward's Tavern. No rebels seen except few bushwhackers. One of Co. A killed rebel bushwhacker after we got into camp.

> June 23: Left camp at 4 oclock and marched 22 miles to Sweet Springs, crossed three ranges of mountains; bushwhackers fired into train.

> June 25: Left camp at 9 A. M. marched to Meadow Bluffs, 24 miles, got into camp at daylight. Our advance ran some bushwhackers out of Lewisburg. Out of rations since yesterday.[40]

While Union troops dealt with Confederate guerrillas, Confederate troops faced equally determined Union irregular fighters. Thomas Gore, from Company D of the 15th Mississippi, was camped in the Cumberland Gap before the Battle of Wildcat Mountain in October 1861, and he later wrote that rumors ran rampant in camp about local Union bushwhackers. One of his comrades was shot in the nose by a bushwhacker with a squirrel gun. W. J. McMurray of the Confederate 20th Tennessee also reported a rather humorous encounter with a supposed bushwhacker the night before that battle. His company was awakened by a shot, and, being green

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[39] George W. Braggs Journal, May 14, 1864, May 15, 1865, May 18, 1865, Charles Austin Goddard Papers, Section 3, VHS.
[40] Ibid., June 1, 1865, June 3, 1865, June 23, 1865, June 25, 1865.

troops easily frightened and thinking they were under attack, began a disorderly retreat down the mountain. The officer in charge managed to halt what would have become a humiliating retreat before any of them ever faced a single Union soldier. Eventually they discovered the shot had been fired by one of their own pickets at a supposed bushwhacker near the camp. The picket had killed a mountaineer in blue jeans who had a squirrel gun with him, but whether a single bushwhacker was trying to engage an entire company of Confederate troops or not could never be determined.[41]

Confederate soldier Micajah Woods spent most of the war stationed in western and southwestern Virginia, and recorded many encounters with bushwhackers. After a December 1862 raid into Kentucky, he wrote to his father "We had no general engagement, but what was far worse; scarcely a day passed that the skulking bush-whackers [Union home guards] did not attack some portion of the column." Woods' experience against union guerrillas only grew, as he soon joined the Virginia State Line and spent a year fighting them almost exclusively. As the war wound down and the Confederacy slipped into a dire existence, resistance from Union guerrillas continued. In Lee County, some Confederate soldiers met a band of 30-40 bushwhackers and skirmished near Harlan Court House in March 1865. The soldiers were forced to retreat after they exhausted all of the ammunition, unable to drive the bushwhackers away because they only had four rounds.[42]

Although Union guerrillas such as the Swamp Dragons in Pendleton County attacked secessionist civilians, the civilian targets in western Virginia remained primarily Unionists. These

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[41] McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 35.
[42] Micajah Woods to My Dear Father, December 16, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 117, 225.

became targets for Confederate guerrillas as they attempted to undermine local support for the occupying Union army. By mid-1862, guerrilla warfare had injured Union morale, and within months Unionists were vocally complaining about the amount of property that guerrillas had stolen or destroyed throughout the region. The guerrillas seemingly prowled at will. To disrupt local governments, they destroyed or took control of post offices and courthouses, threatened to attack courts of law, and waylaid sheriffs and tax collectors. Irregular bands considered themselves arbiters of justice who alone could restore order by forcing their enemies to submit or flee. Lee County housed a band of Confederate guerrillas who boasted they never took any prisoners when they encountered Unionists, but killed those they captured on the spot. For many civilians in western Virginia, the war remained bloody and brutal until the very end.[43]

Many Confederate guerrillas hoped that the threat of violence against citizens would cause support for West Virginia's statehood to falter. By August 1862, guerrillas had seriously affected the federal government's ability to maintain control over the central part of the region, the area that is now southern West Virginia. With the general war going poorly for the Union in early 1863 and the seeming invincibility of Confederate guerrillas, many Unionists had lost faith in the Wheeling-based Restored Government of Virginia, the entity that made the statehood of West Virginia constitutional by bestowing its consent for the new state. Guerrillas attacked county governments, hoping to prevent the impending split of Virginia and then later to make the authority of the new state of West Virginia ineffective. Because their actions ushered in anarchy in many areas, their impact had a greater political effect than a military one. During the war, Unionists never effectively controlled more than half of the counties of West Virginia. However,

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[43] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 84-86; Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 98; Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare," 271-272; Paludan, *Victims*, 71.

some Unionist politicians used images of a violent guerrilla war to argue that only a new state would effectively bring peace to the region. This meant the Confederate guerrillas' actions were only partially effective, since their opponents used them for political gain. Additionally, any involvement Unionist guerrillas had may have worked to their political advantage.[44]

With guerrilla warfare becoming so prevalent in the area, governments on both sides of the conflict took steps to address it early in the war. Guerrillas required special attention from the established governments, and the response of these governments grew over time as they struggled to adapt to the nature of the irregular war. On March 18, 1862, Confederate Virginia Governor John Letcher created the Virginia State Rangers, making Virginia the first state with a statewide system to regulate guerrilla bands and try to adopt guerrilla warfare as an official military policy. Letcher believed these bands would provide local defense and give his government the opportunity to try to regulate the guerrilla bands already in existence. He also hoped they would prevent the Union from being able to pacify western Virginia. He recognized the legitimacy of ten bands, including George Down's Moccasin Rangers and John Spriggs' Braxton County Rangers, and offered them legal protection in exchange for the bands submitting to his orders and conforming to civilized warfare.[45]

Letcher authorized Gen. Imboden to raise a regiment of partisans in western Virginia. Within two months, Imboden reported that "Three of my companies are now rendering important service in Pendleton and Randolph Counties in breaking up Peirpont's militia musters and

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[44] McKinney, *Fayette County*, 133; Rice, *West Virginia*, 135-136; Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 431; Jon L. Wakelyn, "The Politics of Violence: Unionist Pamphleteers in Virginia's Inner Civil War," in *Guerrillas, Unionists, and Violence on the Confederate Home Front,* ed. Daniel E. Sutherland (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 60.

[45] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 91; Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 423; Osborne and Weaver, *The Virginia State Rangers and State Line*, 4.

capturing notorious Union men." He then expressed confidence that the commitment to irregular warfare would prove beneficial, writing, "the Federal troops have nearly all been withdrawn from the Northwest and the bogus State government is left to take care of itself. Peirpoint has issued a proclamation calling out his militia. Half the people will refuse to obey his call, and are represented as ready to join me as soon as I can appear amongst them with arms to put in their hands."[46]

Following Letcher's lead, the Confederate War Department issued General Orders No. 30 on April 28, 1862 that included a portion that was commonly called the Partisan Ranger Act. This made partisan warfare legal across the Confederacy and authorized the Confederate President to commission officers to form bands of partisan rangers. These rangers received the same pay, rations, and quarters, and faced the same regulations as other soldiers. Additionally, they were reimbursed for any arms or munitions they stole from the enemy and delivered to the quartermaster. Typically, they were allowed to retain other captured items, making the position lucrative for those engaged. The Act prohibited the formation of any corps without going through proper military channels. It was initially met with popular approval across the Confederacy, and troops of Rangers were organized to maintain control and harass enemy supply lines. Although the public believed the Act showed an expanded commitment to guerrilla warfare, it was in actuality an attempt to regulate the fighting that was already occurring. The Act did not spread irregular warfare geographically, but it did intensify it and cause an ever growing confusing guerrilla system.[47]

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[46] J. D. Imboden to G. W. Randolph, June 23, 1862, *OR*, Series 1, LI (2), 578-579.
[47] John C. Breckinridge to Jefferson Davis, February 18, 1865, *OR,* Series IV, (3), 1094-1100; Jones, *Gray Ghosts and Rebel Raiders*, 76; Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict*, 86, 93-94; John T. Seawell to James A. Seddon, December 30, 1862, *OR,* Series IV, II: 303; Sam W. Melton to N. D. Collins and H. J. Price, July 16, 1863, *OR,* Series IV, II: 639.

Even with the initial successes that occurred under the Partisan Ranger Act, problems arose. While the Act was passed to regulate irregular warfare, illegal bands of guerrillas continued to operate. Many of the companies in the South that claimed to be operating under the authority of the Act were not on the list that Richmond officially recognized. Another problem the Confederate leaders immediately faced was that men began to use partisan organizations to avoid conscription. A national conscription act had been passed concurrently with the Partisan Ranger Act, and many believed that they could choose to become a ranger rather than join the army. This seriously impeded recruiting for the regular army and prompted the Confederate Congress to pass legislation on July 31, 1862 prohibiting conscripted men to enroll in ranger companies and setting the age requirement for rangers to thirty-five and older.[48]

Despite this additional measure, correspondence to the Confederate government as early as August 1862 contained recommendations by governors and military officials that partisan bands be absorbed into the regular army. Discipline and order within partisan groups were rarely maintained, until, as one governor wrote to Jefferson Davis, the organizations came "to be regarded as more formidable and destructive to our own people than to the enemy." One farmer from western Virginia agreed with that assessment, and wrote angrily to Jefferson Davis after two ranger companies had taken his hay and pastured their horses on his property that "there must be a screw loose somewhere in the management of this Warr or otherwise private property would be respected." He also noted that if "this reckless sistem of destroying property"

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[48] Henry T. Clark to George W. Randolph, August 28, 1862, *OR,* Series IV, II: 71-72; Henry T. Clark to G. W. Randolph, July 13, 1862, *OR,* Series IV, II: 4-5; Geo. W. Randolph to Jefferson Davis, August 12, 1862, *OR,* Series IV, II: 48; S. Cooper General Orders No. 53, July 31, 1862, *OR,* Series IV, II: 26; H. Heth to His Excellency the Governor of Virginia, April 2, 1862, *OR* Series I, LI (2), 526; Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict,* 101.

continued, the Confederacy would become "a great desert of woful waste."[49]

The presence of partisan groups also encouraged desertion, and many soldiers longed for the potential riches and adventure that the regular army could not provide. A Confederate soldier in Greenbrier County wrote to his wife in 1863 that a band of partisans operating around the New River "are having a merry time and if it were not such a desolate country where they are, I could wish for the sake of a little excitement to be with them." For Confederate soldiers from western Virginia, the position held an enhanced appeal since it also offered them the chance to fight the enemy close to their homes, which were behind enemy lines. As desertion rates from western Virginia counties rose with the lingering war, some deserters offered their services to local partisan bands. Although Confederate officials prohibited partisan leaders to allow deserters to join their bands, the Confederacy's inability to control these fighters meant their direction often went unheeded.[50]

On January 11, 1864, Confederate Brig. Gen. Thomas Rosser wrote a letter requesting that partisans be outlawed. Jeb Stuart forwarded the letter to Robert E. Lee, acknowledging how detrimental such bodies had become. Lee forwarded the correspondence to the War Department, and on February 14 the House of Representatives abolished the Act and ordered the partisan groups be merged with regular commands. On April 21, 1864, Secretary of War James Seddon modified the revoked orders to allow McNeill's Rangers to continue their operations in western Virginia under the sanction of the Confederate government. He also permitted John Mosby's band in northern Virginia to remain intact, noting that the two commands had been able to

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[49] Geo. W. Randolph to Jefferson Davis, August 12, 1862, *OR,* Series IV, II: 48; James A. Seddon to Jefferson Davis, November 26, 1863, *OR,* Series IV, II: 1003; Lynda Crist, ed, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1971), 8:508, quoted in Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 163.

[50] John P. Sheffey to My Dear Wife, July 18, 1863, John P. Sheffey Papers, Carol M. Newman Library, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA (VT).

maintain efficient command and discipline, and that their actions greatly benefitted the Confederate cause. The following January Jubal Early requested that Lee ask for those exemptions to be revoked, since they were causing "dissatisfaction and disorganization" within the regular troops, but the Secretary of War refused the request. While all other partisan bands had been outlawed on paper, the deteriorating state of the Confederacy allowed many partisans to continue to operate as they had in the past.[51]

Although they officially recognized and sanctioned some irregular fighters who fought for their cause, Confederate soldiers took harsh measures against Union guerrillas when they encountered them in western Virginia. By 1862, Confederate soldiers routinely tried Unionists who shot at Confederate pickets as guerrillas and executed them. During the Jones-Imboden Raid, Jones commanded his raiders to respect the regular Union soldiers, but added in regards to the Union home guards that he did not care "what they said to the damned bushwhackers."[52]

Union commanders shared a similar approach to Confederate officials. Since they retained control of most of western Virginia and its secessionist guerrillas during the war, they implemented several different measures to try to find an effective response to irregular fighters. Protecting the B&O was their greatest concern and the toughest antiguerrilla assignment in Virginia, since the railroad provided a vital lifeline to the western theater. Early in the war they assigned patrols to "protect [the railroad] from the incendiaryism of the disunionists volunteer companies forming and preperations [they] are making in every corner for a long hot and bloody

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[51] Thomas L. Rosser to Robert E. Lee, January 11, 1864, *OR,* Series I, XXXIII: 1081-1082, and the following endorsements: 1082-1083; R. E. Lee to S. Cooper, April 1, 1864, *OR,* Series I, XXXIII: 1252, and following endorsements: 1252-1253; Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict*, 256; O. O. Howard to Butterfield, June 18, 1863, *OR,* Series I, LI (1), 1061-1062; Jones, *Gray Ghosts*, 214.
[52] Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 43; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, quoted in Matheny, *Wood County*, 338.

contest."[53]

Because residents near the railroad were so often victims of vandalism, Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans declared in August 1861 that a special military district would encompass the railroad and all of the military posts along it throughout all western Virginia to Parkersburg. The following month Brig. Gen. Benjamin Kelley, a former freight agent for the B&O, issued Gen. Order No. 7 that promised full protection to civilians living along the railroad. He hoped his proclamation would quell the uneasiness in the area, but the frequency of the attacks made people doubt the Union could effectively protect them from guerrillas. Kelley eventually had to move his headquarters to Parkersburg to tackle the guerrilla problem full time.[54]

To safeguard the railroad and the civilians living alongside it, the Union built a chain of fortified blockhouses at the railroad's most vulnerable points. Blockhouses were not a new method of defense for Americans, who had employed them in strategically important locations along immigration routes and on the frontier. Those, however, had been designed to withstand attacks from large, organized armies, while the smaller ones along the B&O were built specifically to defend against irregular fighters and small raids. Union officials in western Virginia also introduced armored locomotives and heavily armed engines to patrol the rails.[55]

While the methods the Union implemented to protect the B&O were a passive response to the guerrilla problem, commanders simultaneously turned to active antiguerrilla measures, as well. They established counterguerrilla units and called on loyal citizens to rise up and help pacify irregular Confederate fighters. Their methods in dealing with captured Confederate

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[53] Flavius Josephus Ashburn, June 16, 1861, Flavius Josephus Ashburn Diary, WVA.
[54] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 89; Matheny, *Wood County*, 122.
[55] Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 96.

guerrillas grew harsher as the war continued, and many Union soldiers became frustrated at their lack of success in controlling the region. When these active measures only proved to be partially effective, the Union also began to incorporate retributive measures against the civilian population who supported irregulars.

While the Union had actively implemented small unit patrolling at the beginning of the war in its antiguerrilla campaign, it soon turned to specialized antiguerrilla units when the patrolling failed. These units hunted down irregular fighters and fought them on their own terms, successfully engaging untrained guerrillas but often struggling against more skilled partisans. Units such as the Loudon County Rangers and Captain Richard Blazer's cavalry detachment were mustered just to hunt down irregulars, while others in the area were prepared to face both conventional and unconventional troops. Other counterguerrilla units, such as Company C of the 11th (West) Virginia Infantry who was assigned to engage the Moccasin Rangers, were made up entirely of Unionist civilian volunteers. Union troops also allowed Unionist guerrillas to arrest suspected enemies, and some tried to stalk common meeting places for guerrillas, hoping to catch them unawares.[56]

From the earliest part of the war, district commanders tried to mobilize all citizens to assist in tackling the guerrilla problem. In May 1861, when he first saw secessionists beginning to muster, Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan issued a proclamation to western Virginians urging unity. When his call for unity failed and secessionists remained devoted to their cause, he implemented the first of many different antiguerrilla policies western Virginia experienced. On June 23 he vowed to deal with irregular fighters to the severest rules of military law, a practice

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[56] Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 79, 97, 231; Connrespondence to Capt. Bascom, July 11, 1862, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, RG 393, NARA.

many Union soldiers enthusiastically employed. As the war went on, their response to irregular fighters became harsher as brutal guerrillas who were not concerned about assisting military strategy grew more prevalent and Union commanders failed to distinguish the difference between guerrillas in their response.[57]

In 1861, Union Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck, the fourth most senior general in the army, wrote *International Law, or, Rules Regulating the Intercourse of States in Peace and War*, partially in response to the guerrilla warfare that plagued the state of Missouri. When he took command in Missouri, he quickly realized the inadequacy of his predecessor's methods in fighting guerrillas. According to his taxonomy of war, he claimed the conflict was both a revolution by virtue of its aims and a "national war" that offered protection for troops in organized armies. Guerrillas, however, were considered criminals and not entitled to any rights of war; therefore, they were not afforded the status of prisoners of war when they were captured, and could be imprisoned or punished as rebels. Other Union commanders throughout the Confederacy, including those in western Virginia, followed Halleck's example when dealing with irregular fighters.[58]

As early as September 1861, Union newspapers contained accounts of deaths of captured Confederate guerrillas occurring under suspicious circumstances. One relayed a story of a western Virginia regiment, guarding telegraph workmen, who captured an old man and his two sons. After they learned that evidence pointed to the three men being a part of a guerrilla band, the old man and one son were killed by either a "visitation of God" or as "justifiable homicide."

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[57] McKinney, *Fayette County*, 16; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 33.
[58] Grimsley, *Hard Hand of War*, 16; Henry W. Halleck, *International Law, or, Rules Regulating the Intercourse of States in Peace and War* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1861), 795.

Soldiers felt justified in responding in a lethal manner to all irregular fighters after "concealed enemies" began to "crack away" at them with squirrel guns from elevated land. One Union soldier complained that the overhanging rocks and hills offered more protection than the army's breastworks, and that "an open foe can always be met with equal weapons, but our brave volunteers, ignorant of the country, fight against the odds through the hills, ravines, and passes of Western Virginia. They trudge along unmolesting, and are shot down in their tracks." He felt the guerrillas' approach left them no other option but to respond harshly. He concluded, "it is horrible warfare, but what are we to do?"[59]

After taking command of the new Mountain Department of Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky on March 28, 1862, Maj. Gen. John C. Frémont ordered the village of Addison to be burned after he learned that it was a rendezvous for guerrillas. He later admitted the "lesson inflicted upon the guerrillas in this instance was severe." It had, however, "induced their leader to send in a letter offering terms of compromise." Success with these harsher measures encouraged him to continue to implement them, and he had several captured guerrillas given a "full and fair trial by military commission," and then "promptly executed by hanging." He claimed the "effect was to correct a mistaken belief in immunity for their crimes, and to render more secure interior points and roads, as well as loyal inhabitants of the military districts." He ordered two guerrillas hanged in Roane and Braxton Counties in retaliation for a group of guerrillas killing one of his soldiers. His goal was to "exterminate" every guerrilla in western Virginia, but he was sidetracked from his objective when Jackson's Shenandoah Valley

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[59] *Daily Alta California*, correspondence from the *Cincinnati Times*, September 17, 1861, 1.

Campaign forced him to divert most of his sources to meet the threat there.[60]

When Capt. John S. Sprigg was captured in May 1862, one month after the Virginia state government recognized the Braxton County Rangers to be a part of the Virginia State Rangers, his case sparked a reassessment of how the Union should deal with irregular fighters who were sanctioned to fight by the established Confederate government. Since Sprigg did not fight in a uniform, he could have been treated as an outlaw under Halleck's definition of permissible responses. Confederate and some Union officials argued, however, that the authority the state of Virginia gave him to operate entitled him to be treated as a prisoner of war. In September 1862, Confederate Maj. Gen. Thomas Hindman corresponded with Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman asking that authorized Confederate irregular fighters be extended protection upon capture under the organized rules of warfare. Sherman disregarded the request, responding,

> Now, whether the guerrillas or partisan rangers, without uniform, without organization except on paper, wandering about the country plundering friend and foe, firing on unarmed boats filled with women and children and on small parties of soldiers, always from ambush, or where they have every advantage, are entitled to the protection and amenities of civilized warfare is a question which I think you would settle very quickly in the abstract. In practice we will promptly acknowledge the well-established rights of war to parties in uniform, but many gentlemen of the South have beseeched me to protect the people against the acts and inevitable result of this war of ununiformed bands, who, when dispersed, mingle with the people and draw on them the consequences of their individual acts. You know full well that it is to the interest of the people of the South that we should not disperse our troops as guerrillas; but at that game your guerrillas would meet their equals, and the world would be shocked by the acts of atrocity resulting from such warfare. We endeavor to act in large masses, and must insist that the troops of the Confederacy, who claim the peculiar rights of belligerents, should be known by their dress, so as to be distinguished from the inhabitants.[61]

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[60] Rice, *West Virginia*, 133; Report of Maj. Gen. John C Frémont, June 27, 1862, *OR,* Series I, XII (1), 5-6; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 96; *Harper's Weekly*, May 31, 1862, 3; Noe, "Who Were the Bushwhackers?" 7.

[61] Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 428; Sherman to Hindman, September 28, 1862, *OR*, Series I, XV: 682-683.

To make this differentiation official policy and to address the Confederacy's passage of the Partisan Ranger Act, the Union army passed General Order No. 100, also known as the Lieber Code, on April 24, 1863.[62] The order showed that the Union believed the Ranger Act was an open call for guerrilla warfare and needed to address it in an official capacity. It protected partisan rangers while concurrently allowing those who engaged in warfare out of uniform to be shot upon capture. It was, however, purposefully vague and allowed soldiers to apply the rules at they saw fit. Union soldiers could, therefore, implement conciliatory or more harsh measures against guerrillas depending on their mood. The code saw the soldier/civilian relationship as reciprocal in nature and permitted the army to adopt stern measures against them, as well, if they used armed resistance against the army or supported guerrillas. The frustration Union soldiers felt from chasing an illusive enemy led many of them to begin to engage in punitive measures against civilians.[63]

Halleck had permitted retributive methods in *International Law*, and the Lieber Code seemed to encourage it. Halleck had thought it best to punish the actual perpetrators when possible, but believed communities could be held responsible for guerrilla activities committed near them. Commanders began to hold prominent local secessionists responsible for guerrilla activity, and some, in retaliation against bushwhackers, simply arrested any handy secessionists, especially if weapons were present. In August 1861, Rosecrans issued a proclamation to the loyal citizens of western Virginia demanding civilians assist in putting a stop to the guerrilla war, and vowed those who failed to suppress local violence would be treated as "accessaries to the crime." In his proclamation he blamed the plight of the loyal citizens of western Virginia on the

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[62] Franz Lieber was a German-American legal scholar and political philosopher.
[63] Mountcastle, *Punitive War*, 41-45; Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 101.

"Richmond junta" who refused to allow them to remain citizens of the United States. Worse, he claimed, these "conspirators" had, "in violation of the laws of nations and humanity, … proclaimed that private citizens may and ought to make war." He appealed to their conscience to make them see their personal responsibility in combating the guerrillas who fought in response to Richmond's call. He concluded,

> You are the vast majority of the people. If the principle of self-government is to be respected, you have a right to stand in the position you have assumed, faithful to the constitution and laws of Virginia as they were before the ordinance of secession…

> To put an end to the savage war waged by individuals, who without warrant of military authority lurk in the bushes and waylay messengers or shoot sentries, I shall be obliged to hold the neighborhood in which these outrages are committed responsible…unless they raise the hue and cry and pursue the offenders…

> Unarmed and peaceful citizens shall be protected, the rights of private property respected, and only those who are found enemies of the Government of the United States and peace of Western Virginia will be disturbed. Of these I shall require absolute certainty that they will do no mischief.[64]

When the Union army moved through the Little Kanawha Valley in the fall 1861, they arrested many of the leading secessionists in the area and imprisoned them in Charleston. In April 1862, a Hardy County resident noted the Union's increased intolerance for secessionists, writing in her diary "they were so inraged that some of our Soldiers are bush whacking them" that they "have catched every one of the Men John & Culdize & all made them take the Oath of Illegince contrary to their wishes."[65]

When Maj. Gen. John Pope took command of the new Army of Virginia in mid-July

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[64] Grimsley, *Hard Hand of War*, 16, 115; Noe, "Who were the Bushwhackers?" 16; Halleck, *International Law*, 457; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 33; W. S. Rosecrans to the Loyal Citizens of Western Virginia, August 20, 1861, *OR*, Series I, V: 575-577.
[65] Rebecca Van Meter, September 23 [1861], Van Meter Diary, WVA; Joseph Henry Pendleton, 1862, Joseph Henry Pendleton Letter, LVA; Rebecca Van Meter, April 5, 1862, Van Meter Diary, WVA.

1862, he issued orders before he left Washington on the same day he assumed power that the army would live off the land and that the local population would be responsible for curbing sabotage and guerrilla activity. Although he had not personally assessed the problems in the area, he felt they constituted a stern, immediate warning, and hoped his actions would restore order to the area. However, he, like his predecessors, was never able to successfully bring guerrilla warfare in western Virginia under control, despite the retributive measures he implemented.[66]

In late July 1862, three Confederate rangers in Jackson County stole groceries, and in retaliation Union officials had the houses of the rangers burned. Later that week a squad of cavalrymen set out to track the rangers down after receiving reports of other "outrages" they committed. A force of 60 rangers opened fire on the soldiers and killed one. After the cavalrymen were unable to capture any of the rangers, the Union forces burned the house of a violent secessionist in retaliation. They also burned the house of one ranger's father, who admitted he had fed the rangers and would not hesitate to do so again. Not satisfied with those efforts, the following day a different cavalry squad set out to search for the rangers again, and once their efforts also failed, they burned two more secessionists' houses and captured men known to be guerrillas, although little proof existed that they had been part of the band who attacked the soldiers the previous day.[67]

In areas where secessionist sentiment created potential difficulties, Union officials at times forced many pro-Southern residents to leave the area. In a letter from Mercer County in November 1861, a mountaineer who had experienced such treatment wrote sarcastically to his cousin, "Have you seen in the newspapers how the horrid Yankees politely requested us to leave

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[66] Grimsley *Hard Hand of War*, 86-97.
[67] *Memphis Daily Appeal*, July 29, 1862, 1.

the futile valley of the Kanawha and the Union loving people that dwell therein—and how with equal politeness we did leave rather than quarrel about it?" At times, however, Union soldiers could not effectively tell friend from foe. They quickly learned the seemingly friendly farmers could in reality be a part of an ambush, and some secessionists willingly took the oath of allegiance to avoid suspicion yet continued to engage in irregular warfare against the Union without hesitancy. Many Union soldiers believed that no mountaineer could be won over with kindness. As the war progressed, many soldiers vowed they would take no more guerrillas prisoners and only rested after seeing guerrillas come to quick deaths if they got too close to the army.[68]

In April 1863, Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside issued a death penalty from the Department of Ohio that applied to all western Virginians living behind Union lines. He declared that all citizens who "commit acts for the benefit of the enemies of our country, will be tried as spies or traitors, and if convicted will suffer death." This order encompassed anyone who wrote or carried secret correspondence, who tried to recruit for the Confederate army or pass through Union lines to join the Confederates, who were in the Confederate service, or who gave any information to the southern army. He then added that it also included "All persons within our lines who harbor, protect, conceal, feed, clothe, or in any way aid the enemies of our country." Anyone found guilty could expect swift action and no sympathy. Burnside's order concluded, "the habit of declaring sympathies for the enemy will no longer be tolerated in this department. Persons committing such offenses will at once be arrested with a view of being tried as above stated, or

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[68] Henry Gibbon Cannon, November 27, 1862, Henry Gibbon Cannon Letter, LVA; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 33.

sent beyond our lines into the lines of their friends."[69]

These harsh measures lasted through the war and in places were effective. The Union army was never, however, able to fully control guerrilla activity or establish firm control in western Virginia during the war. Even in 1865, the Union army was still conducting its antiguerrilla campaign, executing captured partisans, conducting wholesale destruction of towns that were supposedly infested with guerrillas, forcing evacuations of civilians from areas that partisans received support from, and holding local secessionists accountable for any damage guerrillas did to army supplies or to loyal citizens' property. As late as April 1865, Union commanders were still discussing the most effective punishments to implement against disloyal citizens. Despite employing passive, active, and retributive methods against irregular fighters since the beginning of the war, Union commanders could not obliterate guerrilla conflict in western Virginia and faced continual harassment from guerrillas fighting with the desire to assist the Confederacy's military strategy until the Confederate government dissolved.[70]

Because they remained a noticeable presence until the end and continued to pursue their goals, these guerrillas who fought for political causes achieved a degree of effectiveness. On a small scale their effectiveness was limited, since small groups of men were unable to do any notable damage against the large armies that moved through the area. While guerrillas could successfully drive back pickets, strong scouting parties could force them to flee. Additionally, whereas armies had the strength to destroy towns and could operate openly, guerrillas could only

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[69] "General Burnside's Death Order Penalty," April 13, 1863, Scrapbook 1862-1864, WVA.

[70] Russell Hasting, *Genealogy and Autobiography of Russell Hastings Autobiography,* May 6, 1864, XI, 7, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center Library, Fremont, Ohio, quoted in Duncan, *Lee's Endangered Left*, 46; Jno. Echols to Breckinridge, May 5, 1864, *OR,* Series I, XXXVII (1), 717-718; Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 92; "Martial Law," Scrapbook 1862-1864, WVA; "Headquarters 2ND infantry Division, Department of West Virginia, General Order No 18, By Brig. Gen. Carroll, H.J. Johnson, Lieut. and A. A. G." Scrapbook 1862-1864, WVA.

fire sporadic shots from the bush in retaliation. As a whole, however, Confederate guerrillas

forced the Union to station over 40,000 troops in the area until the end of the war to keep the

new state of West Virginia loyal, long after northern commanders ceased to believe the area held

value as an invasion route into the rest of Virginia. In this way, then, these guerrillas offered

valuable service to the Confederacy by keeping so many Union troops from the front lines of the

major military campaigns. Similarly, Unionist guerrillas assisted the Union army in keeping

secessionist guerrillas ineffective in controlling the largely Unionist population of northwestern

Virginia, allowing the support that portion of the state offered to West Virginia's new statehood

to ensure the state's survival.[71]

This effectiveness was evident from the beginning. During the early years of the war,

Confederate guerrilla bands had frustrated Union efforts to mount larger military operations in

western Virginia by tying down large numbers of troops and forcing the Federals to scatter their

command. At the beginning of 1862, the Union army still did not understand the seriousness of

the situation, and many commanders expressed the belief that a quick and effective solution

existed for the guerrilla problem. Union newspapers also ran editorials claiming that the southern

civilians were "sick to death" of guerrillas and that their intolerance would prompt them to take

up arms to put a stop to it. Both of these responses showed that northern commanders and

civilians failed to grasp the nuances of the guerrilla warfare that occurred during the Civil War,

and by failing to distinguish between the guerrillas who fought for political and military causes

and those who fought for more personal gains, their response was never fully effective. Civilians

living in western Virginia and throughout the Confederacy may have been "sick to death" of the

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[71] B. Bibb, "Fayetteville in the Civil War," B. Bibb Manuscript, WVA: 2; Robertson, ed., *Civil War Letters of Sheffey*, 133; Freehling, *South vs. South*, 56, 64.

bushwhackers who used the lawlessness of the era for personal advancement, but many remained

supportive of the guerrillas who fought for the same cause they supported. Expecting civilians to

help fight politically-minded guerrillas, then, was unrealistic.[72]

As 1862 came to a close, Union commanders were beginning to recognize how difficult it

would be to stop guerrilla warfare. In official communication to Union Virginia Governor

Francis Pierpont, Brig. Gen. Robert H. Milroy despaired that large armies were useless in

western Virginia. He complained, "They cannot catch guerrillas in the mountains any more than

a cow can catch fleas." He recommended the army establish a system of Union guerrillas to put

down the Confederate guerrillas, an idea never fully implemented, although the Union army did

rely on the home guards and Unionist irregular fighters to help stabilize the area.[73]

By November 1864 the Union army was still reporting the capture of large numbers of

enemy guerrillas, and in February 1865 a large cavalry scouting party near Moorefield, West

Virginia, skirmished with a band of guerrillas and captured over twenty of them. The

psychological toll of fighting a phantom enemy with no clear route to victory grew on the Union

soldiers, and one referred to the war they were fighting in western Virginia as more "savage and

brutal" than the war his comrades were fighting against the organized Confederate army. After

the 23rd Ohio Infantry returned to West Virginia following their involvement in Philip Sheridan's

Valley Campaign, its men conducted daily expeditions, comprised of 10-100 men, chasing

guerrillas, engaging bands that were so large at times they appeared to be more a part of the

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[72] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 92; *New York Times*, April 24, 1862, 12; *Louisville Daily Journal*, November 1, 1862, 2.
[73] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 162; R. H. Milroy to Pierpont, October 27, 1862, Francis H. Pierpont Executive MSS, LVA, quoted in Richard Orr Curry, *A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1964), 75.

Confederate army than guerrilla companies.[74]

As raiders, partisans, and guerrillas became involved in irregular warfare for political and military reasons, their actions became both defensive and offensive. They concurrently desired to defend their communities while contributing to larger, national causes in a more independent manner than the organized army allowed. Through attacking railroads, slowing down army advances, attacking enemy civilians to undermine support for enemy troops, or influencing the establishment of the state of West Virginia, these Union and Confederate guerrillas remained involved in the war through the end. As the established government took steps to control their own guerrillas and implement active, passive, and retributive responses against enemy guerrillas, the penalty for being caught conducting irregular warfare became more brutal and potentially lethal as the war lingered. Despite the danger participating in irregular warfare held, guerrillas in western Virginia continued conducting it for military and political purposes and contributed to the chaotic nature of the area until the Civil War came to an end.

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[74] *The Columbus Gazette*, November 11, 1864, 2; *Harper's Weekly*, February 18, 1865, 2; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 34.

CHAPTER II
Bandits, Outlawry, and Terror: Guerrillas Motivated by Personal Advancement

Guerrillas rendering military service had the potential to be a valuable tool for the organized armies, but virtually from the beginning of the war some also operated in a more lawless realm, and the value of the system broke down accordingly. Some operated openly while others remained anonymous, and their motivations and goals were all self-centered. The mountaineers' very nature was inherently individual, undisciplined, and suspicious, which made bushwhacking a natural type of warfare for them. They mustered and disbanded as they pleased, usually operating in small bands or family clans who took on names such as the "One Arm" Berry Gang or the Black Striped Company. This type of guerrilla warfare turned neighbor against neighbor and caused the breakdown of authority on the homefront. As the conflict dragged on, the mountains became full of these bushwhackers and marauders who acted out of greed, power, revenge, or plain spite. Intimidation and terror became their aim, and the psychological threat they established created an atmosphere of rumors and dread.

Both the Union and Confederacy adopted policies to kill these guerrillas on sight as they struggled to answer the threat and establish security in the regions their armies controlled. Ultimately, the responsibility to confront these outlaws fell to their victims, the local residents whom they successfully terrorized throughout the conflict. Their presence forced the Union Army to keep valuable troops and resources in the area to ensure loyalty in the face of such danger, while those who operated in Confederate-controlled counties caused many secessionists to lose their trust in the ability of the government to effectively govern. This lawless form of warfare was so prevalent that those in the Appalachian South later referred to the era as "the time

of the Bushwhackers."[1]

The instability of the borderlands created opportunity for bushwhackers, since the breakdown of law and order resulted in a culture of fear on which they could prey. As national events led to the outbreak of war, western Virginia became rife with rumors. In May 1861, one diarist wrote that "everything is in confusion…War! is all we talk about. …I am very sorry to see such preparations for I know we will suffer if two Armies are in Va." Two months later Flavius Ashburn, a preacher who rode a circuit through Virginia's mid-western counties, lamented that "because iniquity abounds the love of many is waxing cold. Difficulty in our nation—difficulty in churches and difficulties in families have become almost universal." As the armies infiltrated the area and conflict broke out, the fear grew more palpable. Throughout that year and the next, Ashburn noted on his journeys that "there are great fears entertained at this time," we "hear so many rumors that it is difficult to discern what is true," and "West Virginia is thrown into great agitation, fear + uneasiness filling the minds of nearly all. Some are leaving home and fleeing from the Rebels for safety while others are seeking protection among them." In February 1862, Rebecca Van Meter, a Hardy County resident, wrote that she had not been able to attend an acquaintance's funeral, because she and her family were "afraid even to go to the Church to hold a little prayer for fear of loosing all of the horses we have."[2]

With the loss of law and order came a breakdown of morality. Roadside robberies became common occurrences, as did public drunkenness and black market activities. One western Virginia newspaper bluntly stated "every man in this community is swindling everybody else,"

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[1] Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare" 271; Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 419; Drake, "*A History of Appalachia*," 104.

[2] Diary, May 23, 1862, Blundon & Matthews Families Papers, WVA; Flavius Josephus Ashburn, Saturday, July 27 (1861), April 5, 1863, Tuesday May 5, Sunday evening 10th, Flavius Josephus Ashburn Diary, WVA; Rebecca Van Meter, Feb. 10 Monday, RebeccaVan Meter Diary, WVA.

and crimes of all types rose. Personal fights led to deaths, and civil authority broke down in the

lawlessness. Out of this atmosphere bands of renegades rose to power. Local citizens referred to

them by a plethora of terms, but "bushwhackers," "marauders," "horse thieves," "desperadoes,"

and "bandits" received the most use.[3]

Some deserters from the organized forces joined these marauder bands, roaming about

the countryside wreaking havoc. These were usually deserters without local ties who fled to the

western Virginia mountains seeking the nearest shelter from those who pursued them to take

them back to the army and put them on trial. Most local deserters who made their way back

home deserted to help protect their families, although some did sink into outlawry as the war

dragged on.

Bill Parsons, who operated in and around Roane County, became one of the most

notorious bushwhackers in western Virginia. His nickname, "Devil Bill," reflected his reputation,

and one Union soldier described him as "filthy in appearance, and, like the rest of his class, has

low instincts, and is as ferocious as a hyena." He was rumored to have eleven wives, including

one who was his own daughter. Wilson Moore of Barboursville also caused his neighbors grief,

as he wreaked havoc around Cabell County until some Federal soldiers captured him in March

1864.[4]

Some women became infamous guerrillas, as well. Mary Jane Green, originally from

Braxton County, roamed from Wood County to Clarksburg, and sometimes as far away as the

Kanawha Valley, cutting telegraph wires and engaging in other guerrilla occupations. She was

arrested in August 1861 and sent to Atheneum Prison in Wheeling, where she caused such a

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[3] James I. Robertson, Jr., *Civil War Virginia*, *Battleground for a Nation* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 111; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 158.
[4] Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 420; Nelson Cox to Kellian Van Rensalear, March 3, 1864, Kellian Van Rensalear Papers, Section 1, VHS.

disruption that the Union authorities there decided she was less worrisome to them at home

cutting their telegraph lines than she was in prison. If she was not asleep, she threw loud,

boisterous tantrums to keep everyone awake, and ultimately interfered with the orderly operation

of the institution to such an extent that Union officials paid to send her away. She did not make it

home before she was rearrested for leaving the train to cut a telegraph wire, and she was thrown

back into a cell at Atheneum, bound head to toe for the safety of her captors. One well-meaning

guard tried to calm her, and once she had quieted down he ill-advisedly released her of her

bonds. She immediately hit him in the chest with a nearby brick, breaking several of his ribs. She

was eventually sent to City Point, Virginia, an official exchange point for the Union and

Confederate armies, and disappeared from the record books after that. Presumably she spent the

remainder of the war as she had started it, wrecking havoc in Braxton County.[5]

Most bushwhackers remained below the political fray, refusing to identify with either

side in the conflict, which caused soldiers in both armies to hate the sight of them. Many formed

opinions of western Virginians from their conception of bushwhackers that reflected a class bias

evolved into a sort of pseudo-racism. One Union soldier, writing home to his family in Ohio,

gave an unflattering account of the bushwhackers:

> Imagine a stolid, vicious-looking countenance, an ungainly figure, and an
> awkward if not graceful, spinal curve in the dorsal region, acquired by laziness
> and indifference to maintaining an erect posture; a garb of the coarsest texture of
> homespun linen or linsey-woolsey, tattered and torn, and so covered with dirt as
> not to enable one to guess its original color; a dilapidated, rimless hat or cap of
> some wild animal covering his head, which had not been combed for months; his
> feet covered with moccasins, and a rifle by his side, a powder-horn and shot-
> pouch slung around his neck, and you have the beau ideal of a Western Virginia
> bushwhacker. Thus equipped, he sallies forth with the stealth of a panther, and lies
> in wait for a straggling soldier, courier, or loyal citizen, to whom the only warning
> given of his presence, is the sharp click of his deadly rifle. He kills for the sake of
> killing, and plunders for the love of gain. …They do not stop at pillage, for oft-

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[5] Matheny, *Wood County*, 182-188.

times is their track marked with blood. The leaders of some of these bands have acquired great notoriety by their cold-blooded brutality and adroitness at theft….[6]

The Confederates had scarcely better things to say, with one soldier describing western Virginia as an "uncouth, & miserable region, a region composed of nothing but inhospitable peaks & desolate crags, unfit for the habitation of man or beast, & if per se unworthy of a struggle or a drop of blood to retain them." The inhabitants were "ignorant, depraved in their ideas of life, living from hand to mouth, inhabiting shabby log huts, unchinked & without chimneys, they almost inspire you with disgust for the whole race. I dare that say no spot in all the sunny south is more remote from civilization & refinement…." He concluded, "like all mountain people they are clannish & suspicious of strangers, & strong in their predudices & preferences."[7] He later continued his unfavorable description with another equally bleak account in a letter to his father:

> No person reared in the full light of our Eastern Virginia civilization can form a remote conception of the condition of the Counties through which we passed and their inhabitants. To subdue the people, the houses of the greater portion of the Southern men have been committed to flames, and their families thrown out into the dreary world, homeless, destitute and penniless. Neighbor against neighbor, —the roads are waylaid, and in many communities the men have not slept in their own houses for months past, but have pursued a course of life termed "laying out" in the gorges of the mountains, watching for opportunities to slay some solitary political or personal opponent. Language fails me in expressing my intense disgust and abhorrence of the main body of the population of this region— ignorant, filthy, malignant, and semi-savage in their nature, the war has called forth their worst passions.[8]

These negative descriptions of the region that abound in soldiers' letters home drew an inaccurate description of who the bushwhackers really were. In historian Kenneth Noe's study on the age, class, and kin of western Virginia's bushwhackers, he consulted the prisoner lists the

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[6] Charles Lieb, *Twelve Months in the Quartermaster Corps; or the Chances of Making a Million* (Cincinnati, 1862), 126-127, quoted in Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 420.

[7] Micajah Woods to My Dear Mother, November 13, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA.

[8] Ibid., to My Dear Father, December 16, 1862.

Union army kept from the area and compared those to the 1860 census records. His findings were surprising. Many of the bushwhackers were much older than the average soldier, with an average age of 34 among the sample he collected. The youngest captured bushwhacker on record was 16, and the oldest 64. He also discovered that many were from the landholding class and some even enjoyed social standing in their community, which meant that the guerrilla war in western Virginia was not a class war. Noe concluded that the importance of kin and neighborhood shaped and unified the bushwhacker bands more than any other factor. In his sample, nearly all of the gangs operated in their home county, and none farther than two counties away.[9]

Since bushwhacker gangs rarely left the area where they were raised, their victims and neighbors could usually identify them by name. Jane Bennett, a Harrison County resident, recorded in her diary in June 1864 that a band of guerrillas had raided the neighborhood that day and stolen horses, cattle, meat, and "everything else they could carry." Several of the residents followed them to get their stolen property back, and tragically one of the townspeople was shot by a Union soldier who mistook him for a member of the bushwhacker gang. Bennett lamented that the event was "unfortunate," since "Mr. Anderson is a splendid citizen." Most tellingly, however, she proceeded to name two of the bushwhackers, noting that the previous Thursday "Bill Pierson and Bill Callahan shot Frank Meeks, but he is still living today." Further east in Hardy County, the same phenomenon occurred. Rebecca Van Meter recorded in her diary that a bushwhacker had been caught by the Union army, but "none of us asked who it was, for fear of being suspected of knowing something." Sure enough, the bushwhacker "turned out to be Mr T.

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[9] For more information on Noe's findings, see his article, "Who Were the Bushwhackers? Age, Class, Kin, and Western Virginia's Confederate Guerrillas, 1861-1862." *Civil War History* 49:1 (March 2003): 5-26. He shares his findings and compares his work on western Virginia with other similar works on other areas of Appalachia.

Athy," well known to everyone in the neighborhood.[10]

Such familiarity was widespread. Nancy Hunt wrote a series of letters from Fayette County to family in the north, and she dutifully relayed the neighborhood news. In December 1862, she wrote, "A company of guerrillas headed by Bill Taylor came into our store and took possession in the name of the southern confederacy and intended to rob the store of everything, and did take about $100 worth of goods, but was prevented from taking more by the arrival of A. Forsythe who together with Sam Tyree, Rob Frazier and Bob Nichol stopped them." She later concluded that he was not operating under any governmental approval, but "it was just a Bill Taylor raid." A Union officer "sent up a scout to arrest them but could not find them. I guess they did not try very hard." The following fall she mentioned new bands that had formed. "The Rebs have organized a new company in the County. Young Sam Tyree is captain and John Halstead is lieutenant. They call themselves independent. They are in here almost constantly and have done us much damage. …Then they went to stealing horses and have taken a great many out of here but some have got theirs back. This is not the worst of it. They have done some bushwhacking." She goes on to recount other guerrilla activity, specifically mentioning several of those involved by name:

> Riley Ramsey is captain of a company, I do not know what they call themselves. He has a commission from the governor of this state, perhaps militia or homeguards. They scout around in this and Nicholas county. One day a part of his Company were hauling rations from Gauley Bridge and when near Mr. Crist place they were fired into from the brush. Sam Tyree himself killed Austin Edes. Riley's son was slightly wounded. Then both parties ran. The day before Riley killed one of Tyree's men and wounded 2 or 3. I never heard of Riley bushwhacking. He gives them a chance for their lives.[11]

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10 Jane Bennett, June 12, 1864, Aunt Jane Bennett Diary, WVA; Rebecca Van Meter, Dec. 29 1862, Van Meter Diary, WVA.

11 Nancy Hunt Letters, December 7, 1862 and September 28, 1863, Charles Austin Goddard Papers, Section 3, VHS.

The Union army struggled the entire war to maintain control over the portion of Virginia they had occupied since near the beginning of hostilities. They were more successful in urban areas than in the more rural ones, where guerrilla bands roamed harassing their neighbors. The rural areas remained turbulent through the end, because the Union soldiers remained too busy fighting the guerrillas who attacked military targets to do much about bushwhackers or bandits. The problem persisted across the entire portion of the state, from Hardy and Pendleton counties in the east to Cabell and Wayne in the west. As far north as Harrison County, locals complained about the presence of large bands of bushwhackers, and from Lee County to Carroll County in the south, remaining authorities struggled to combat the rampant lawlessness.[12]

At the end of November 1861, the *Wheeling Intelligencer* ran an editorial discussing the extent of the problem. While no Confederate troops remained north of Charleston, Federal troops did not have the area contained. The paper noted that Webster, Braxton, Gilmer, Calhoun, Roane, Jackson, and Wirt counties had had large numbers of secession votes the previous Spring, and "it would not be far from the truth to say that there are as many armed marauders there as there was secession voters." The reason so many "marauders" congregated there was that "renegades from Marion, Harrison, and Taylor and other counties…have fled to these obscure counties for plunder and protection." The problem persisted despite the Union's attempt to dispatch hundreds to thousands of troops at various times to bring the counties under control. The Unionist paper continued to complain,

> But what have they done? Just about enough to exasperate the rebels, and make them more like children of the devil than they were before. There has been…more property stolen and destroyed within the last six weeks than at any previous time. Some rebels have been killed, and a few more have been taken prisoner and sent off; others have been required to take the oath, and others have voluntarily taken it

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[12] Stephen V. Ash, "White Virginians Under Federal Occupation," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98:2 (Apr. 1990): 182-183; Rebecca Van Meter, May 28 Wednesday, Van Meter Diary, WVA.

when an armed force was in the midst; but with few exceptions they might as well have sworn on an almanac, to believe the "conjectures of the weather," as to have sworn them on the Bible to be true to their country…They understand the movements of our troops perfectly, and all they have to do on their approach to a certain place where they will rendezvous, is to withdraw for a few miles and hide in some obscure place, and they are safe. There is good reason to believe that there are at least one thousand rebels in the seven counties mentioned divided in squads from one dozen to one hundred, and engaged in stealing everything they can get from a horse, down to the frock from a childs back and the beads from its neck. …There is a scope of country from Pocohontas to the Ohio River, a distance of 150 miles in length, and about 75 in width, which is almost entirely under their control.

Then, astutely recognizing how the different types of guerrilla warfare overlapped each other, the editorial concluded, "While some are murdering and stealing others are conveying the property to the rebel army."[13]

While some of the different types of guerrillas' actions overlapped, the motivators behind them were unique. Those involved in the bushwhacker or marauder war operated on a meaner societal level than those who employed guerrilla tactics to assist the national war effort. The bushwhackers' actions often appeared to be no more than banditry or murder, but some of their mayhem had a purpose. They often targeted their neighbors who had sided against them in the war or waged family feuds that had nothing to do with any broader issues. Differentiating between the two types of guerrillas could be challenging, and the opportunity for partisans to be a strategic military force for the Confederacy often led that government to turn a blind eye to all types of guerrilla fighting. Conversely, the Union army often treated captured partisans as they did bushwhackers, also failing to properly grasp the nuances in the guerrilla war.[14]

Many of the guerrillas involved for personal advancement carried out their actions for no greater purpose than to gain power or wealth. Their greed is evident from accounts their victims

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[13] *Wheeling Intelligencer*, November 30, 1861, quoted in Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 419.
[14] Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare," 273.

left, and their raids became a normal part of life to the mountaineers. One letter writer from Tazewell County in February 1865 claimed that "there never has been such a time for rogerry robing and every other kind of low down meanness as has been practiced in the last years." The mayhem worsened with the war, as "it has been four years since the war commenced, but the last year is a head of all. Five or ten armed men will go through a neighborhood enter the houses at late hours of the night and rob them of everything that was valuable and perhaps take every bite their children had to eat[.] some that you know was engaged in it."[15]

Other sources from throughout the region for the duration of the war verify that claim. In February 1862, Union troops stationed in Braxton County captured men from Ben Haymond's "gang out outlaws," who for several months "had been guilty of shooting soldiers and citizens as they passed on the road from behind rocks and trees, robbing, plundering, and horse stealing, rape, and every crime and enormity that a man can commit almost." The previous summer they had drawn the ire of the occupying troops when they killed a young soldier from the Ohio 17th with a scythe. The lad had been seized with a "fit" when he was out scouting, and his comrades had left him at a farmhouse. After he recovered he set out to rejoin his regiment, and he stopped at a house belonging to one of the outlaws to ask for something to eat. The men were all out mowing, and the woman there gave him food and then sent word that "there was one of the damned abolitionists; come and kill him!" They hurried into the house and chopped him to death with their scythes. After their arrest, some of the band were charged with murder and sentenced to hang, while others were imprisoned and sentenced to hard labor for the duration of the war.[16]

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[15] A. C. M. A. Hansard to Dear Brother and Family, February 24, 1865, A. C. M. A. Hansard Letter, VT.

[16] Lt. Col. Harris to Gov. Pierpont, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, February 23, 1862, RG 393, NARA; Lt. Col. Harris to Capt. Hartsuff, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, March 3, 1862, RG 393, NARA; Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War*, 52.

In October 1862, Rowsy Peyton was killed in his native Montgomery County. He was a man "noted for his merriment," who was particularly outspoken against deserters. Some thought a band of deserters killed him for that reason, but since his body had been dragged off the road, his watch taken, and his pockets all turned out, most agreed a band of robbers was to blame. He had been going to purchase cattle for himself and his brothers, carrying a large amount of cash. In that same area between the summers of 1862-1863, Nathaniel Menefee carried out robberies, alternately claiming a commission from the Confederate government and a Kentucky militia commission to avoid blame. He stole untold numbers of livestock and goods, claimed on behalf of a government that never received them. He was later captured and court marshaled, and after his old quartermaster testified against him at his trial, Menefee hunted him down and shot him at his mother's funeral.[17]

Counties bordering Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina often had to deal with bushwhacker raids from those states. On March 30, 1863, five men from the Tiger Rifles who operated out of Blountville, Tennessee, rode through Scott County, Virginia, robbing and intimidating. They wounded one Virginian and killed another during robbery attempts. In June of that year Washington County suffered a similar raid from marauders from the eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina mountains. The Abingdon *Virginian* referred to these men as "Tory bushwhackers," noting their more Unionist sympathies. While no Virginians died at their hands, they did steal over $1,000 from various residents and tried to destroy some property.[18]

The counties north of Charleston also saw their share of guerrilla warfare. In January 1864, residents in the Kanawha Valley petitioned the Union army to provide more protection for

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[17] Micajah Woods to My Dear Father, November 5, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 4.

[18] McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 156.

them from the "hordes of guerrillas, who infest the mountains and pounce upon us when and while we are unable to protect ourselves in any degree." The guerrillas stole "money, bedclothes, wearing apparel, even down to ladies dresses and children's shoes and stockings. Some families have been reduced to want in this way. They have even taken the last knife and fork in some instances." The residents feared they would next steal livestock, as many bushwhackers had started to do in neighboring Braxton County. They requested one or two companies be stationed along the roads to watch and guard the passes the guerrillas used. In return, the citizens promised to continue to show their loyalty to the United States government.[19]

These bushwhackers represented danger to a vulnerable population, especially in the southern portion of the state, which the Confederate army had all but completely abandoned by the end of the war. George Robertson's father decided to move his family from Saltville to North Carolina after the Confederates lost control there. To try to protect his family, he brought along a wagonload of salt in hopes that he could use it to buy off any bushwhackers they encountered along the way. Whether or not that would have worked remains unknown, since the family managed to avoid guerrillas, but the effort demonstrates the type of measures western Virginians took to cope with the reality of bushwhackers, especially in regions where the military had a limited presence.[20]

Not all bushwhackers participated in the guerrilla war out of greed or a desire to gain control over their neighbors. Clan warfare meant many operated for revenge. Sandy Basin resident Jasper Sutherland, who sent his memoirs to his grandson years after the war, recollected "people had grudges against some neighbor. So they got together to steal and destroy the property of absent soldiers, and even kill those whom they particularly hated." In a letter to Sarah

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[19] J. Bouse and 31 Others to Brig. Gen. B. F. Kelley, January 29, 1864, *OR*, Series I, XXXIII: 510.
[20] Walker, *War in Southwest Virginia*, 127.

Anderson, James McClure Scott recounted the story of a western Virginian named Coons, who confronted three soldiers from Ohio, demanding to know if one of them was the man who had killed his father. When he received an affirmative response, he used his carbine to kill the man. Murder was not the only occurrence that offered the occasion for revenge. Peter B. Rightor was a well-to-do farmer in his mid-fifties, who had been an outspoken secessionist before the war. His Unionist neighbors took exception to his views, and when the Union army marched through the neighborhood in June 1861, someone burned Rightor's house. Rightor spent the rest of the war bushwhacking, living only for revenge.[21]

As the guerrilla war descended toward outright outlawry as the war progressed, some bushwhackers became motivated to join out of spite, simply because the opportunity presented itself. Army deserters, genuine outlaws, bullies, and thieves used the collapse of law and order to pillage, loot, destroy, and murder. Unlike those bushwhackers who used their identities to exert influence over their neighbors and gain local power, many who bushwhacked for spite often did so anonymously without any apparent reason. A Harrison County resident recorded a short entry in her diary in May 1863 that simply read, "A big frost. Most everything killed. Some unknown person shot and killed Press Moss' horse today. The only one he had." For a time, Lewis County had no sheriff, law enforcement officers, or laws, and one citizen recollected after the war that unknown parties killed several people. The blame was laid on the military, but "in reality done by persons for personal spite, taking advantage of turmoil then existing and no effort was made to apprehend the perpetrators." Porter W. Arnold at Jacksonville became one of those

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[21] Jasper Sutherland to E. J. Sutherland, October 15, 1921 (Box 22), Elihu J. Sutherland Papers, Special Collections, University of Virginia's College at Wise Library, Wise, VA, quoted in Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 236; James McClure Scott to Sarah Anderson, Undated, Sarah Anderson Papers, VHS; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 87.

"lamentable occurrences," when he was killed without anyone being able to figure out why.[22]

The New River Valley became prey to several of these operations. In Spring 1862, James Wiley was attacked at his home on Flat Top mountain, but was able to chase the band away with the aid of his young son Milton. A short time later he and his son were attacked again by another band and killed. On August 8, 1864, Albert B. Calfee and his younger brother John C. Calfee were traveling with Elisha Heptinstall from Mercer County to Raleigh County. They were fired on by one of these bands and Heptinstall and John were killed. About the same time, Jacob Harper was attacked at his house in Raleigh County. He was taken prisoner, dragged into the woods, and shot. His neighbors recollected that he was a plain, honest, peaceable citizen who never harmed anyone. The *Louisville Daily Journal* reported in December 1864 that two former residents of Rockbridge County had fled their homes to avoid conscription, and made it 75 miles west before they were set upon by bushwhackers. One was killed and the other was severely wounded, but he managed to flee to the woods and elude his pursuers. The men who fired on them did not know who they were nor what their intentions were, but saw the opportunity to kill two men and tried to take advantage of it.[23]

Whether they were motivated by greed, revenge, or spite, the bushwhackers all aimed to intimidate and spread terror in order to be able to operate more easily. This singular goal created an atmosphere of fear in western Virginia that empowered bushwhackers and put them in a position of control. As historian Daniel Sutherland has noted, "Unfortunately, the best method of achieving the goal of terror was, likewise, terror." Having the capability to strike anywhere at any time for any reason allowed the bushwhackers to achieve their goal. Examples of this

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[22] Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare," 285; Jane Bennett, May 18, 1863, Aunt Jane Bennett Diary, WVA; "Recollections," Scrapbook, Lewis County, ca. 1910s, WVA.

[23] David E. Johnston, *History of the Middle New River Settlements and Contiguous Territory* (Redford, VA: Commonwealth Press Incorporated, 1906), 315; *Louisville Daily Journal*, December 17, 1864, 3.

abound. In Harrison County, Jane Bennett recorded in December 1861, "William was shot at today while standing in our yard. The bullet passed though the skirt of his coat. We found tracks of the bushwhacker at the upper side of the orchard, but they led into the road, and we could follow them no farther." In the Kanawha Valley a young diarist who knew his attackers wrote, "Old Bob Thompson came riding up and asked Ma how many minutes she wanted to get things out of the house. he found out we didnot care and then he said he was not going to burn."[24]

In Washington County nearby malcontents sent waves of terror through the residents, prompting a group of citizens in Abingdon to send a letter to General Breckinridge, the commander of the Confederate troops in the area, asking for protection. They stated that the bushwhackers had "robbed the houses of several citizens living in the valley, took away eight horses, shot at several, and killed Fayette Marks." They had threatened to return and burn Abingdon, as well as kill several others. "The citizens on the south side of the country…are in dread nightly of a repetition of another raid by the gang, and the loss of more property and the loss of some of their lives." By the end of 1864, citizens throughout western Virginia lived in fear of raids by organized forces and in terror of the local bushwhacker bands.[25]

Marauders success in creating an atmosphere of terror allowed them to produce a psychological threat made them more effective. This impact gave bushwhackers the opportunity to achieve complete dominance over an area, allowing them to operate with the least possible personal risk. Because bushwhackers had proved that they could be anywhere, civilians thought they seemed to be everywhere. With outside news sources cut off, rumors became rampant and

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[24] Daniel E. Sutherland, "Guerrillas and the Real War in Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 52:3 (Autumn 1993): 267; Jane Bennett, December 10, 1861, Aunt Jane Bennett Diary, WVA; Civil War Diary, September 18 [1862], Blundon & Matthews Families Papers, WVA.

[25] Shaffer, *Washington County*, 72; Samuel S. Glenn and 59 Others to John C. Breckinridge, November —, 1864, *OR*, Series I, XXXIX (3), 873-874; Walker, *War in Southwest Virginia*, 153.

mistrust spread. One writer from Fayette County had to retract a previous diary entry after she learned more facts about an event. "What I wrote about the soldier and his wife being bushwhacked is generally believed by the soldiers to be false. They think he shot himself and the woman with him was not his wife." Similarly, one from Monroe County recorded, "Last week there was a rumor that 500 negros with 50 white men at there head were marching…in this direction. The home guard all turned out, + were in hourly expectation of meeting with the enemy when Dr. Oley returned home after a ride of 60 miles to inform them the report was without the least foundation." With a combined lack of law enforcement and environment of terror, civilians never knew what to believe or who to trust.[26]

With the goal of establishing security and order in the areas they controlled militarily, both the Confederacy and the Union tried to respond to the threat of bushwhackers, although their failure to discern between the different goals motivating guerrillas reduced the effectiveness of their measures. They both alternated between threatening to carry out retributive measures against the civilians to stop the bushwhacking and pleading with the people to assist them in stopping it. They burned homes of suspected bushwhackers and even tortured their families to try to gain information. As the war wore on, soldiers often took to killing anyone suspected of bushwhacking on sight without giving them the chance to surrender, sometimes under official orders and sometimes acting on their own. While the bushwhackers' viciousness was already present, this behavior only encouraged them in their lethal aims, since capture meant certain death.

In January 1862, Col. Edward Siber of the 27th Ohio Infantry unsuccessfully tried to

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[26] Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 425; Fellman, *Inside War*, 23, 51-53; Nancy Hart Letters, May 31, 1864, Charles Austin Goddard papers, Section 3, VHS; M.E. Caperton to Her Husband, June 4, 1861, Caperton Family Papers, VHS.

track down the Black Striped Company, which had been terrorizing Guyandotte Valley citizens. Although he failed in his objective, he did take the time while he was there to burn numerous farmhouses, the courthouse, and other public structures in the town of Logan, on the grounds that they had sheltered the Confederate cavalry at one point. By that point most Union soldiers advocated for fierce retaliation against the guerrilla problem, and that mindset justified the harsh treatment of not only the irregular fighters, but also of the local population, as illustrated by the events at Logan.[27]

When George Crook became a Union commander in western Virginia early in the war, he approached the guerrilla problem with antebellum methods he had learned while fighting Indian tribes. In his autobiography he wrote that "Their suppression became a military necessity, as they caused us to detach much of our active force for escorts, and even then no one was safe. It was impossible for them to be caught after shooting into a body of men, no difference as to its size. The question was how to get rid of them." To do so, he sent suitable officers throughout the country to learn it and take special note of the bushwhackers' haunts and eventually begin to capture them. This method, however, had its weak points. The accused bushwhackers served short prison terms, then immediately returned to their former occupation. Crook's men developed a less than honest way of countering that, tracking them down again and dealing more harshly with them. Apparently, "some of the captured guerrillas slipped and broke their necks after they were caught, while others were accidentally killed by premature discharge of a weapon, or perhaps the prisoner fell into the river and drowned." Whatever the nature of these "accidents," Crook wrote, "they never brought back any more prisoners."[28]

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[27] Rice, *West Virginia*, 130-131; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 89.

[28] Martin F. Schmidt, ed., *George Crook: His Autobiography* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 87, quoted in Mark A. Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War,* 52.

This solution of dealing with bushwhackers spread. A sergeant in the 178th Pennsylvania Infantry wrote in May 1863 that a great stir occurred in camp when someone shot at a bushwhacker. While no one could ascertain for sure whether it was a bushwhacker or not, he darkly noted that "if it was a bushwhacker he knew it was death if they got him," because a "reward was given to a soldier hoo caught a bushwhacker dead or a live." The following year in Fayette County, Union soldiers hanged 10 bushwhackers along the road with notes pinned on them that read, "this is the fate of all bushwhackers."[29]

If the threat of certain death caused the guerrilla war to grow more vicious, the Union army remained steadfast in their efforts to establish peace in the region. Threats to citizens' security made their loyalty waver, and threatened the success of the new state of West Virginia. While the statehood movement was still gaining support, the Union army struggled to maintain loyalty. On October 30, 1861, Col. Conuly Posh reported to Gen. Cox that he had arrested eight citizens in the area around Charleston, and arrested some "Sesesh" of influence along the river. He hoped the attempt would "cure…that kind of warfare in this vicinity." In January 1862 Col. Toland wrote to Cox, requesting a federal force be sent to "demolish" the "great mass of marauders" in the central counties of western Virginia who "sally forth and commit their depredations…then fall back." In August 1862 a similar request was made in Hardy County, where the Federal troops stationed men along every main road, looking for bushwhackers.[30]

That same month, Capt. Cunningham received orders to scour the country along the New River to "disperse any band of Bushwhackers that might infest that region, seizing their property,

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[29] Charles D. Levan from Camp Columbia, May 11, 1863, Charles D. Levan Letter, LVA; McKinney, *Fayette County*, 191.

[30] Correspondence to Genl. J. D. Cox, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, October 30, 1861, RG 393, NARA; Lt. Col. Toland to Cox, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, January 9, 1862, RG 393, NARA; Rebecca Van Meter, August 29, [1862], Van Meter Diary, WVA.

and if their houses are used as places of rendezvous, to destroy them." He failed to apprehend Phillip Thermond's band, which had been his main target, but the following week he returned to the area and went to the house of William Therman, who he had learned was a member of the band and who opened his house as a rendezvous point for them. He had his men seize all the movable property that would benefit the army, then removed the family from the house and burned it to the ground. He also burned five outbuildings, "any of which with some labor might have been turned into dwelling houses or places of resort."[31]

Because partisan bands relied on widespread civilian aid in order to survive, using punitive methods against civilians who assisted them was a sensible way to combat them. The failure in the official policy to distinguish between guerrillas' different motivations, however, brought unnecessary hardship on many civilians, since punitive efforts when dealing with bushwhackers were senseless. Bushwhackers did subsist off of the general populace, but the civilians were their involuntary victims, not willing providers. When the army's methods to punish bushwhackers included punishing citizens for the bushwhackers' actions, they often lost a chance to gain loyalty in the area. In May 1862, a Hardy County resident complained "The Yankeys at town had just sent off Mr Gilkinson, Sam W. Mechem, & Mr Alfred Taylor to Wheeling because our people had bushwhacked them at Wardensville, it makes them so mad they are not in the sences, they think by taking our inocent Men they will stop it, but I hope they will have a rough road to travel yet before they get quite into Richmond." That practice became more and more common as their attempts to counteract guerrillas proved fruitless. In July 1862, Col. Lightburn requested a company of men to put down those who were growing bolder with the threat of a Jenkins raid to the area. In response to his request, he was instructed,

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[31] Correspondence to E. P. Seammon, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, August 8, 1862, RG 393, NARA.

…and let it be everywhere understood distinctly that the secessionists of the neighborhood will be held responsible for mischief done by guerrillas…. Arrest them promptly and keep them confined at Charleston till they can give good security for their behavior. Activity, energy and if need be severity must be used to make them understand through the whole [Kanawha] valley that it is best for all dissenters…to keep quiet.[32]

In February 1863, the Senate of the Restored Government of Virginia considered a bill to carry out even more retributive responses on civilians. One newspaper editorial called it a "barbarous and savage bill," recognizing the danger that such methods posed to keeping the populace loyal. Defenders argued the bill was necessary to stop the frequent guerrilla raids, but critics worried that they would essentially be meeting "raids with raids." The bill held secessionists or those with suspected southern leanings responsible and liable for all of the property of Unionists destroyed or lost in guerrilla raids and robberies. It also allowed for civilians to be arrested and held as hostages, a measure that potentially gave pause to cavalry raiders. Against the atrocities conducted by spiteful bushwhackers, however, such threats achieved little, since those guerrillas little cared what impact their actions had against civilians. During the debate, neither the bills' critics nor advocates recognized guerrillas' different motivations, once again illustrating a major weakness in the Union's attempts to deal with the problem.[33]

Despite their best attempts, the measures the Union army implemented failed to stop the growing numbers of bushwhackers. In August 1864, Maj. Gen. Kelley received correspondence from Col. Wilkinson that contained a bleak outlook. Wilkinson reported guerrillas infested all counties south of Clarksburg, "robbing houses, stores, and stealing horses." Although he had been ordered to protect the railroad and the country, he stated the command was "utterly

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[32] Rebecca Van Meter, May 17, [1862], Van Meter Diary, WVA; Gen. Cox to Col. Lightburn, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, July 27, 1862, RG 393, NARA.

[33] *Wheeling Daily Press*, February 4, 1863, 1.

impracticable," since he had only 39 men under his command. He worried that even a small band could successfully cut off Union correspondence or attack the railroad, and requested reinforcements. His superior promised to send him more men soon, but the number of troops the Union army would have had to commit to fully police the area and restore order was more than they were willing or able to pull from the front lines.[34]

Similar to their Union counterparts, the Confederate authorities also tried to take what measures they could against guerrillas in the areas they controlled militarily. At the beginning of the war, when their fortunes looked bright and their forces advanced through the western portion of Virginia, they took an active role in trying to thwart the building lawlessness. As far north as Harrison County in December 1861, a diarist recorded one such attempt. She wrote that two companies of cavalry under Captains Sprigg and Tuning passed through searching for Bill Pierson and his company of guerrillas, who had been on a rampage in Braxton County and fled, after murdering three men on Oil Creek, when the Confederates started chasing them. Confederate attempts to track down bushwhackers stalled when southern troops were pushed south and later forced out of western Virginia almost completely. Their deteriorating fortunes as the war progressed left them with more pressing matters that demanded their attention.[35]

With neither army able to effectively protect civilians from the bandits and bushwhackers that so terrorized them, the responsibility to counter these bands fell to the civilians themselves. Because the Union army equated spiteful bushwhackers to partisan fighters, they pressured civilians to resist them. When Rosecrans issued his declaration to the loyal citizens of western Virginia in August 1861, he addressed the spiteful, self-serving guerrillas as well as the partisan fighters, although he was probably mentally equating the two while experience had taught his

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[34] N. Wilkinson to B. F. Kelley, August 23, 1864, *OR*, Series I, XLIII (1), 895.
[35] Jane Bennett, December 20, 1861, Aunt Jane Bennett Diary, WVA.

audience to differentiate between them. After outlining the problems guerrillas were causing, he

placed the responsibility of ending the guerrilla war on the people:

> …Peaceful citizens, unarmed travelers, and single soldiers have been shot down, and even the wounded and defenseless have been killed…. You have no other alternative left you but to unite as one man in the defense of your homes, for the restoration of law and order, or be subjugated or driven from the State…
>
> My mission among you is that of a fellow-citizen, charged by the Government to expel the arbitrary force which domineered over you, to restore that law and order of which you have been robbed, and to maintain your right to govern yourselves under the Constitution and laws of the United States…
>
> Citizens of Western Virginia, your fate is mainly in your own hands.
>
> If you allow yourselves to be trampled under foot by hordes of disturbers. plunderers, and murderers, your land will become a desolation. If you stand firm for law and order and maintain your rights, you may dwell together peacefully and happily as in former days.[36]

To ensure their safety, many citizens did fight back against bushwhacker bands to the best

of their ability. In Tucker County, the citizens passed anti-guerrilla resolutions in the spring of

1862 that were typical of measures other counties took. They resolved that in "the view of recent

raids of guerrillas," they pledged "mutual aid and protection" to each other and to "frown upon

all persons engaged in this diabolical work." They continued that they would all refuse them any

aid, and if necessary "united to resist their incursions for murder and plunder by force of arms."

They placed the duty on each resident to "always be on the alert to gather information

concerning guerrillas, and to promptly transmit such intelligence to his neighbors." They

concluded that they would work to mutually recover stolen property or any citizens who might

be taken prisoner. Further, the resolves stipulated that any citizen who refused to agree to them

would be "deemed a common enemy of the common cause and undeserving our confidence and

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[36] W. S. Rosecrans to The Loyal Citizens of Western Virginia, August 20, 1861, *OR*, Series I, V: 575-577.

protection…."[37]

Although civilians began to take steps to address the guerrilla threat, some in the Union army believed those measures were halfhearted. In April 1862, Col. George Luch reported from Summersville that a company had set out that morning in Webster County with the goal of eliminating a bushwhacker band. He believed the mission would fail, because troops were not able to sneak up on them, and when they knew troops were coming "they disintegrate and hide in the mountains until all danger is over, when they again reassemble for fresh depredations." He also believed that their home base was in Greenbrier County and Lewisburg, and that they forayed into Webster County from there. He expressed his wish for the army to invade Lewisburg and from there be able to clean out towns in Webster County. Although he advocated for this, he also acknowledged that as long as Federal troops were in the area the people looked to them to protect them, and wondered that if the troops were to leave it the people may "depend on themselves for defense, and in fact they could very soon put down these bushwhackers if they would try…." [38]

The *Louisville Daily Journal* noted in November 1862 that these bushwhacker bands were present in all of the states across the Confederacy, highlighting those in Missouri and western Virginia. It predicted that "rebel and loyal citizens" were ready to unite and take up arms to put them down. While the promise of such unity probably stretched the truth, it is telling how problematic the bushwhackers were becoming that a Union newspaper suggested it. Things did not improve with the progression of the war, and by December 1864, West Virginia Governor A. I. Boreman, admitting the government had failed to cope with guerrillas, called on West Virginia

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[37] Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 425.

[38] Col. George Luch to Capt. Bascom, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, April 16, 1862, RG 393, NARA.

citizens to take justice into their own hands and form vigilante groups to battle the bushwhackers. Although the proclamation had been to West Virginia citizens, civilians in Wise County, Virginia, recognized that was their only option, too, since the Confederate government could not even offer them token protection in the final months of the war. One marauder band took up residence there in the early months of 1865. The members did not claim loyalty to either side of the national conflict, but they did begin to engage in stealing what little the mountaineers had left after four years of civil war. They caused trouble for awhile, until a group of citizens joined together to bushwhack the bushwhackers, which ended the threat.[39]

While some citizens, such as those in Wise County, were able to successfully stop bushwhackers, marauder bands continued to roam around western Virginia throughout the war and into the months after the organized armies began to surrender. The effectiveness of these guerrillas is difficult to evaluate, since terror was essentially their only goal and they were motivated for personal advancement. How much personal success they found varied according to the individual bushwhacker or band, but as a whole they did certainly effectively terrorize the region. A Lewis County Unionist recollected after the war that, "it was not the regular Southern army we were afraid of, but of the guerrillas…They were the bandits of the South and though they claimed sympathy with secession, they were not of the army and most of the depredations that were committed in our section, were done by them, and of them we lived in terror."[40]

While they successfully terrorized the entire region, their occupation could be lethal, potentially negating on a personal level any success they as a group achieved. Newspapers often recounted the deaths of bushwhackers, especially when they came at the hands of the army.

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[39] *Louisville Daily Journal*, November 1, 1862, 2; Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 432; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 225.

[40] "Recollections," Scrapbook, Lewis County, ca. 1910s, WVA.

These began early in the war and continued through the end, sometimes generally referring to "the hanging of two guerrillas" and other times providing specific names, as the *Macon Daily Telegraph* did in November 1864 when it reported "…Burleson, the notorious leader of the band of bushwhackers and thieves infesting Scott County, Va., was killed yesterday by some scouts of Col. D.H. Smith, in the Many Sinks country."[41]

In addition to creating a psychological threat, the pervading presence of bushwhackers played a similar role as the partisan guerrillas in keeping extra Union troops in West Virginia. Union military correspondence acknowledged this result, and often commanders expressed the wish that they could have even more troops to assist in the effort. Lt. Col. Russell reported from Charleston in June 1862 that he had led an expedition down the Guyandotte River to make contact with the "loyal people" and "assure them of our protection whenever it became necessary." He learned that there was a bushwhacker band operating around Mud River and he put reliable Unionists in charge of looking after them and reporting on their actions until the army knew their location better and could "attend to them." Concurrent with his mission was one led by Capt. Smith to Hearts Creek, where Russell had ordered him to surround as many houses as possible before daylight since bushwhackers were in the habit of "coming in to their houses during the night and leaving again about daylight." While those efforts were unsuccessful, the excursions had resulted in many of the locals arriving each day to take the oath of allegiance.[42]

Union Major Lot Bowen, stationed in Lewis County, pleaded with his superior that additional forces be sent to the area, because he could sense the citizens' loyalty being shaken, and they were blaming the Union government for their vulnerability against "thieves and

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[41] *The Daily Dispatch*, May 28, 1862, 2; *Macon Daily Telegraph*, November 16, 1864, 2.
[42] "Report of Lt. Col. Russell of 4th Virginia on Affairs in Vicinity of Chapmansville, Virginia," Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, June 2, 1862, RG 393, NARA.

robbers." He asked for two additional companies from the Third Virginia Cavalry to patrol over 60 miles of land. Bowen's entreats on behalf of the citizens there were because he believed "no section of the county has turned out more soldiers than the one above referred to, and, furthermore, West Virginia has no better sons of which to boast than those living in this section." Union officials were able to keep the counties in West Virginia loyal for the most part and helped ensure the success of the new state, but they had to deploy many more forces to the region than they would have liked in order to do so.[43]

The prevailing existence of bushwhackers in Confederate-controlled Virginia caused a weakening in the loyalty to the central government of those citizens, too. Citizens in the boarding counties of Johnson County, Tennessee, and Washington County, Virginia both sent petitions to Gen. Breckinridge in November 1864 pleading with him to send troops to wipe out several bands of bushwhackers who lived in the mountains of Johnson County and frequently raided both areas. Several of the groups were made up of Union deserters who threatened to destroy every southern family they encountered. The Confederacy tried to help when it was able, as illustrated by Colonel Vandeventer's attempts in Lee County to use 150 well-mounted men and organize more militia and local forces to strike back at bushwhackers in that county and in the others in southwestern Virginia. Its lack of manpower on the front lines, however, meant the government could spare no troops to combat mauraders. The Confederacy's failure to provide enough troops to assure the citizens they would not be brutally murdered in the night meant many in those counties shifted their loyalties from a national government to their family clan, although as a

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[43] Lot Bowen to Capt. Melvin, Asst. Adjt. Gen., Department of West Virginia, February 4, 1864, *OR*, Series I, XXXIII: 509.

whole southwestern Virginians remained committed to a Confederate victory.[44]

Bushwhacker or marauder bands did require attention from both sides, but their presence and actions more than likely had no bearing on the war's result. Unlike their partisan counterparts who politically sided with one of the national powers, they rarely bothered to take a side, allowing them to make anyone a potential victim. As they pursued power, wealth, or revenge and terrorized out of spite, they created a level of lawlessness within the counties of western Virginia that neither national government was able to adequately answer. These bushwhackers took advantage of the instability of a civil war to live by their own laws, laws that led to their personal advancement at the expense of their communities and neighbors. Because many of their victims knew the names and identities of those who harmed them, the bitter local divides the war created lasted long after the Confederacy fell. Many bitter family feuds started in the 1860s during the Civil War and lasted well into the 20th century. Those who sought to fulfill their own selfish gains ultimately only assured the tragedy of war would linger for their progeny.

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[44] G. Moore and 14 Others to Gen. J. C. Breckinridge, November 1, 1864, *OR*, Series I, XXXIX, (3), 872-873; Samuel S. Glenn and 59 Others to Gen. J. C. Breckinridge, November --, 1964, *OR*, Series I, XXXIX (3), 873-874; J. Stoddard Johnston to Major-General Breckinridge, November 21, 1864, *OR*, Series I, XLIII (2), 923; Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 128.

CHAPTER III
A True People's War: Guerrillas Involved for Self-Preservation

As the partisan war turned increasingly toward lawlessness and the Confederate government instituted a draft, many mountaineers in western Virginia became involved in the guerrilla war for a vastly different reason from their marauder counterparts: they had no other choice for self-preservation. With the official measures for confronting and controlling the mayhem encountering limited success, some were forced to hide in the hills and steal for sustenance or else face harassment and probable death at the hands of their enemies. These guerrillas' motivations and goals were all centered around survival, and their effectiveness was directly linked to whether or not they made it through the conflict alive. Deserters, draft-evaders, or men who lived in areas controlled by those with differing political beliefs found no safety at home. Entire populations of civilians also took up arms when necessary to defend themselves and their towns against organized troops or destructive bands of bushwhackers.

However their involvement manifested itself, some of these participants' most immediate concern was to remain concealed from those who wished to harm them, while nearly all desired to be near enough to their families to provide for them and defend them. The Federal and Confederate governments took various approaches to address those guerrillas with defensive motivations, but the responsibility to counter them ultimately rested with the general populace. In a rare instance in Floyd County, Virginia, men who joined together in self-defense were able to overthrow the local government and create a haven for Unionists and Confederate deserters, but the overall effectiveness of this group was mixed. The ability to remain out of harm's way varied according to the support of their families, the sympathy of the civilians, and the dedication of the pursuers, and many were unable to remain safely hidden through the end of the war.

Deserters from both the Union and Confederate armies fled to mountainous regions for

safety and concealment. For those involved in the large organized campaigns in the eastern section of the state, western Virginia offered the nearest haven for concealment. Southwestern Virginia became a prime area for deserters, and Floyd and Montgomery counties grew to become favorited refuges. Desertion of men from the area became higher, too, as the borderland became more turbulent and their families became endangered. As these deserters made their way back to their native counties, accounts show that some of them invited deserters from out of the state to join them, offering safety in numbers and the possibility of provisions once they reached sympathetic areas. Danger of arrest and court-martial kept these locals from returning to their homes, but they would find an obscure spot nearby and stay there to provide for and protect their families as they were able. This also allowed their families the opportunity to take them food, care for their needs, and provide warnings when pursuers came into the area.[1]

Confederate deserters from heavy Unionist portions of western Virginia at times viewed their actions as an expression of protest against the Confederacy and its policies. Virginia troops in the Confederate army saw a highpoint of desertions in 1862 during the rigors of the Maryland campaign, but the Federal army was not immune to the problem that year, either. Joseph Addison Waddell recorded in his diary in August 1862 that he spoke with a dozen Federal deserters in Augusta County, Virginia, who were on their way to seek refuge in the Blue Ridge Mountains to escape a pursuit by the cavalry. Ten of the men were from western Virginia while the other two were from northern states. The deserters, Waddell noted, "said there was great dissatisfaction in the Yankee army, many of the soldiers having deserted and many more intending to do so the first opportunity." As long as they were in the Shenandoah Valley the local bushwhackers

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[1] Reynolds, "A Pragmatic Loyalty," 49; Rand Dotson, "'The Grave and Scandalous Evil Infected to Your People': The Erosion of Confederate Loyalty in Floyd County, Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 108:4 (2000): 410.

"guarded" them, although Waddell did not specify if that was for the deserters' benefit or for the safety of local civilians.[2]

Desertion peaked for Virginia troops early in the war, but it remained an ongoing problem for the regular army. Deserters continued to congregate in western Virginia throughout the war. Some, typically those from outside of the state, fell to banditry and lawlessness and joined bushwhacker bands out of spite or for personal advancement. Many native Virginian deserters, however, participated in the guerrilla war only out of necessity for survival. They were often joined by local draft-evaders who were forced to flee their homes to avoid being drafted into the Confederate army. Unwilling to leave their families to find safety behind Union lines, they attempted to avoid conscription officers without actually leaving the area by never being at home when they came. Some draft-evaders in heavy Unionist areas banded together to actively fight those Confederates who attempted to enforce the conscription laws. One notable example was the Swamp Dragons of Pendleton County, which the *Boston Herald* sympathetically called an "organized band of armed citizens" who resisted conscription and attacked rebel scouting parties whenever the opportunity presented itself. One southern soldier disdainfully referred to them as nothing more than a "band of Union land pirates" who avoided their duty. Many Confederate soldiers used the word "scouted" to refer to the Unionists who camped out in the woods to avoid conscription; civilians, meanwhile, often applied the derogatory term to bands of out-of-state stragglers and deserters who robbed and plundered freely through the region.[3]

Deserters and draft-evaders who escaped to the hills in self-defense relied on sympathetic

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[2] Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 95, 92; Joseph Addison Waddell Diary, Monday, August 11, 1862, *Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War*, University of Virginia Library, http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/papers/AD1500 (accessed February 3, 2014).

[3] *The Boston Herald,* February 17, 1864, 4; Joseph Hubbard Wilson to My Dear Mother, January 10, 1862, Joseph Hubbard Wilson Papers, VHS; Mann, "Family Group," 380; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 236.

neighbors and relatives for subsistence and help in avoiding the law enforcement officers and military personnel who sought to track them down. However, these same neighbors and relatives at times became the reason other residents were forced to flee their homes to protect their lives. Some guerrilla bands formed to restore order to their community by forcing the "enemy" to flee or submit by keeping wrongheaded neighbors in check. Regardless of the sentiments of their county or surrounding areas, Confederate sympathizers who found themselves in Unionists neighborhoods or loyalists who lived where secessionists dominated could not express their opinions in safety. One Union man in Pocahontas County recorded in his diary that "many of the secessionists in this neighborhood through shame or fear now profess to be union men and many of them have been taken up and compelled to take the oath of allegiance to the federal government." An 1862 report from a Confederate camp in Lewis County mentioned Union scouts in that area who guided Yankees through the county, and specifically highlighted a man named Gibson who was "notorious through all that section for the persecution of [his] loyal neighbors." A secessionist resident of Hardy County expressed her disgust of the "Union Men & Yankees" who were "carrying a high hand over us, stealing & lying." She concluded that the "Union Men west of us seem to be our worst enemies." [4]

Unionists also suffered the same fate as their secessionist counterparts when they were in the minority. One young boy in the Kanawha Valley recorded in his diary in July 1861 that the secessionists in the area were mad because his father would not join the Confederate army. That October he wrote that a party of guerrillas under the "notorious Hernden" had passed by, and "two came for Pa but he had gone to Winfield. Ma sent Ben to meet him to tell him not to come

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[4] Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare," 271-272; Flavius Josephus Ashburn, Sunday June 30 1861, Flavius Josephus Ashburn Diary, WVA; "Recollections," Scrapbook, Lewis County, ca. 1910s, WVA; Rebecca Van Meter, September 7, 1861, Van Meter Diary, WVA.

home." The following day he added that the "rebels went to Winfield. Eleven came by and Searched the house for Pa, but he had gone to Charleston." By February 1862, the young writer's father was permanently staying away from home, and the family knew if he did not do so "the rebels will take him to Richmond as prisoner." Others faced being reported to Confederate authorities by neighbors. In Russell County, in the fall of 1862, Robert Barker turned in several of his neighbors for having "Unionists tendencies." Despite Unionists attempts at retribution, Barker continued to regularly report them for their political beliefs.[5]

Other western Virginia residents opted for various reasons to "lay out" or "scout" for their safety. A man named Critess in Hardy County had his barn burned in January 1862. He lost some grain and his gears, but his wife had the presence of mind to run and let two calves out before the flames overtook them. His loyalist neighbors "had a pick at him" because his sons were enlisted in the Confederate army. However, many Unionists in the borderland were forced to sleep outside and lie low for awhile whenever the Confederates gained control of their area to avoid being arrested for disloyalty. With the political turbulence that came with areas switching hands several times throughout the war, living and sleeping in the wilderness away from home became a prudent decision many western Virginians had to make.[6]

Whether a deserter, draft-evader, or civilian looking to avoid political opponents, the guerrillas who hid in the mountains were motivated by self preservation—willing to do anything to avoid capture and remain alive. Many deserters in Montgomery County took shelter in abandoned coal mines during the harsh mountainous winters, despite the dangers the mines held. North of Abingdon in Washington County, a band of deserters even defeated a group of

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[5] Civil War Diary, July 13, 1861, October 5, 1861, October 6, 1861, February 11, 1862, Blundon & Matthews Families Papers, WVA; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 117.

[6] Rebecca Van Meter, January 13, 1862, Van Meter Diary, WVA; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 122.

Confederate soldiers on Clinch Mountain, successfully countering those sent to capture them. Often runaways from the same district banded together and fought those pursuing them with guerrilla-style combat tactics. The responsibility to catch deserters usually fell to home guards, which usually consisted of those too young or old to enlist in the regular army. Thus, they often could not mount much of a response against seasoned veteran deserters.[7]

Sometimes those who were former soldiers chose to proactively take steps to ensure their survival and began to hunt down those who wished to do them harm. In June 1862, John R. Payton, who was recruiting for General John Buchanan Floyd in Roanoke County, was shot from his horse while attempting to arrest deserters on Bent Mountain. John Coles had been a witness to the murder, and within a few days he saw his house burnt down in an effort to keep him quiet. By August 1863, county magistrates reported that the Sisson gang, the most notorious in the area, had captured two home guard captains.[8]

Numbers of men did not always ensure safety, however. Margaret Hale of Wise County recalled after the war that to keep from being enlisted, two of her uncles had joined a band of men that roamed around and robbed the community for provisions. A resident out looking for his sheep one day found them, and a crowd of people from town went out and killed them all. In the winter of 1864-1865, a small band of Confederate deserters in Sandy Basin took refuge around Alley's Creek. Four of the men had resided nearby before enlisting, while the fifth was an outsider who had deserted from the Union army. Dave Smith, a local resident who led the crusade to round up deserters in the area, killed a relative of two from the small band when the relative refused to give up the band's hiding place. Enraged, the deserters went after Smith and shot him while he was standing on his front porch. A stray bullet took off the hand of his small

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[7] Dotson, "Grave and Scandalous," 410; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 158.
[8] Dotson, "Grave and Scandalous," 411.

son who was standing near him. Smith's comrades redoubled their efforts to find the deserters

and soon tracked the band down, killing all five men.[9]

For those who did find success in banding together, some went even further and looked to

gain political control of an area in order to ensure long-term survival. A Unionist group known as

the Heroes of America began in the mountains of western North Carolina and by 1863 it had

spread north into Virginia. It became most established in Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski,

Scott, Washington, and Wythe counties, and even penetrated into two Confederate regiments, the

Twenty-second Virginia Infantry and the Fifty-fourth Virginia Infantry. While the group's

influence grew into 1864 and included prominent members of these communities, the protective

organization could do little to alleviate the general war weariness brought on by hardships and

bushwhacker gangs that had gripped the area by then. Pitched battles between them and

Confederate troops attracted the attention of the War Department, and showed that divisions

within the Confederacy had strengthened over time.[10]

While the men who sought refuge in the mountains looked out first for survival, several

other motivations kept them there. Those who fled to avoid the conscription laws did so in order

to be able to maintain their own independence and not be forced to fight against their will. Some

supported the Confederate cause but had no desire to leave the area to fight for it, while others

disagreed with secession altogether. Mountaineers could rally around the idea of fighting for the

right to be left alone, but they balked at being forced to fight for that right. The draft caused

higher levels of desertion, since it got men into the army, but was not effective in keeping them

there. Forced conscriptions became more frequent by 1863, and the practice caused great anger

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[9] McKnight, *Contested Borderland,* 194-195; Mann, "Family Group," 382.

[10] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 236; Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 178; Noe, "Red String Scare," 318-322.

and resentment among Unionists. Many formerly neutral civilians became Unionists after their breadwinner was forcibly removed and placed in the Confederate army. In February 1864, Mr. Ramsdell wrote a letter from Gauley, West Virginia, expressing his disgust over the practice. He lamented, "The Rebs are still ranting through Wayne & Cabell, conscripting—gathering horses, etc. but this has long since ceased to be a wonder & now only seems to deepen the disgust (of many that would otherwise not be Union Men) for the government that enlists most of the able bodied men and then leaves the Women and children to be over run by the enemy."[11]

A few months earlier, when troops from Wise County marched into Holly Creek in the Sandy Basin to enlist men into Confederate service, the locals hastily armed themselves and drove the soldiers away. The Unionists of the area scouted throughout the district to avoid conscription, and they visited friendly homes after dark to eat. They ate "standing with their hats on" so they were ready to run if the "officers came." Many of the Unionist draft-evaders organized home guards in self-defense, and the ensuing guerrilla war over the conscription laws in the Sandy Basin and along the Virginia/Kentucky boarder left no room for civilians to be neutral. The excitement and fear grew to such an extent in Sand Lick that Primitive Baptist Church suspended services for nearly a year, even though the congregation contained no Unionists.[12]

Other guerrillas began scouting because they wanted to fight on their own terms and not under the order of any officer, especially "outsiders" who had never been to the area until the army sent them there. Many of the western Virginia soldiers who deserted did not consider

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[11] Wilma A. Dunaway, "Slavery and Emancipation in the Mountain South," Virginia Tech Online Archives, http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/vtpubs/mountain_slavery/civilwar.htm (accessed December 16, 2013); Reynolds, "A Pragmatic Loyalty," 15-16, 45; Paludan, *Victims*, 69; A. Cunningham Letter, February 22, 1864, Kellian Van Rensalear Papers, Section 1, VHS.
[12] Mann, "Family Group," 383.

themselves deserters. In their mind and in the stories they told to their progeny they remained

loyal Confederate soldiers. When they left the army they did so under circumstances they found

legitimate, whether they went "on furlough" without permission when their families needed their

presence at home or if they felt the terms they had signed up under had expired. These men

would rally and gather the members of their old division who had also deserted to fight if their

region was invaded, because in their minds they remained part of the Confederate army. To them,

however, the Confederacy was their community. Some who left their company without leave to

attend to matters at home returned later on their own volition once their families no longer

needed them. The army sometimes turned a blind eye to these occurrences once the missing

soldier returned, while other times men such as John Combs, who was charged with desertion for

leaving his company on July 22, 1862 even though he returned on his own accord twenty-two

days later, were prosecuted to try to discourage the behavior.[13]

Traditions of local militias contributed to this independent attitude. Militias mustered

when emergencies arose, and its members could come and go freely and return to civilian life

after the emergency was over. This tradition had been rooted in American life since the

Revolution. At the beginning of the Civil War many of the volunteers enlisted with this mindset

and remained more civilian than military. Men who had work that needed to be done at home

could not understand why they had to remain in camp between engagements. Joseph E. Johnston

claimed that this attitude had cost the South more men after Manassas than the Federal Army had

lost by defeat. This was a comparable mindset the soldiers in the Army of Northern Virginia had

who refused to cross the Virginia/Maryland border with Robert E. Lee when he led his army

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[13] Ralph Mann, "Ezekiel Count's Sand Lick Company: Civil War and Localism in the Mountain South," in *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays*, eds. Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 80; "Charges of Desertion Against Private John C. Combs," 1862, William Whig Loring Papers, 1862, LVA.

north in the fall of 1862, claiming they signed up to defend their homeland and not stage an invasion. The mentality caused high desertion numbers in companies from western Virginia after that area of the state fell to Union control. Many of the men wanted to return home when their communities were threatened, and it made no sense to them to help counter a different invasion when their own homes were in the hands of the enemy.[14]

Other mountaineers combined their militia mentality with their concern over local matters when they enlisted in the army. In March 1862, a Union soldier reported a conversation he heard between two "well-known" secessionists in Charleston. As they discussed Wise's retreat from the Valley, one asked the other how he had successfully abandoned the Confederate forces. The deserter replied that when he joined Wise's artillery, he did so on the condition that he would not go "above Gauley or below Buffalo." Once the retreat took him beyond the specified region, he and another man—who had joined under the same condition—refused to go any further. Their Captain told them "they would have to run off as Wise would not let them go." The two men found refuge with a Unionist named Hamilton, who was sympathetic to their plight. Hamilton hid them in the woods and brought them food until they had the chance to make their way home.[15]

While most of the deserters who returned to their homes became involved in the guerrilla war to defend themselves and their families under this militia mindset, they were not the only scouters motivated to fight on their own terms. Many of the mountaineers who had to leave their homes under pressure from their neighbors opted not to flee from their counties, but were driven by the desire to be nearby to protect their loved ones. The impact of the war on both loyalist and

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[14] Blair, *Private War*, 36.

[15] Correspondence To Cox, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, March 20, 1862, RG 393, NARA.

secessionist civilians eventually affected every aspect of life, and kin-centric mountaineers were loath to separate from their families with such hardships present. The movements of organized troops in western Virginia during the early portion of the war destroyed roads that were already rough due to the mountainous terrain and made travel for civilians throughout the war difficult or, in some cases, impossible. By October 1861 one Confederate soldier serving in Fayette County wrote to his wife that the roads were in such poor condition that the teams trying to move the army equipment were "reduced by starvation" from the effort. After the war, Unionists petitioned Congress to "adopt such measures as may seem best" to repay the loyal West Virginia citizens who suffered harm from the Union army during the war. One item they highlighted in their petition was how many of their roads and bridges the Federals had harmed "as means of safety." These measures had resulted in leaving their "principal roads impassable." The state of the roads made the cost of travel increase sharply, bringing further hardship to civilians. One soldier trying to make his way across the area on furlough found that it cost more money than he made in a month to travel on ferries and other conventional means along standard routes. He resolved to walk back to camp, because to take the stagecoach would have cost him more than he had.[16]

While travel was difficult, the poor roads resulted in delays in the postal system, as well. Being separated from loved ones, then, became even more difficult without any reliable means to communicate with them and another reason why many mountaineers tried to remain as close to home as possible, even under adverse circumstances. As early as August 1861 a soldier in Lewisburg wrote to his wife, "I have been very uneasy about you for fear you may have heard

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[16] Randolph Harrison Letters to His Wife, October 12, 1861 and October 13, 1861, Randolph Harrison Papers, VHS; Petition to Congress, January 25, 1866, Kellian Van Rensalear Whaley Papers, Section 2, VHS; Diary of Nimrod Bramham Hamner, Hamner Family Papers, VHS.

some false reports about us while the mails were cut off." Two months later he wrote of the "irregularity of the mails" and hoped she had received his correspondence, "as I fear you have been uneasy about me of late." Another soldier recorded in his diary in September that year that they had not had access to mail for at least ten days, and he did not have the "slightest idea" of when he would be able to mail his letters. He later expressed his frustration with how difficult it was to get news of what was happening in the east without a reliable delivery system. After a May 17, 1862 Confederate raid in northwestern Virginia, a minister noted that the mail had "all but stopped" to that region and he was not sure when it would start again. The problem persisted after the regular troops stopped their major campaigns in the area. In March 1864, a traveler through western Virginia complained that the area experienced about a ten-day delay in their postal service, and with the deteriorating authority of the Confederate government over the next year, the delays grew worse.[17]

The disruption of war also affected an already poor school system. Over five years after the conclusion of the war, Romney, West Virginia, the county seat of Hampshire County and the state's oldest town, was still struggling to maintain a school for its residents. Further south in Lewis County, all of the county's schools closed during the war, and with an elusive peace, families grew concerned over the effect a lack of schooling would have on their children.[18]

Civilians also experienced economic hardships, since war disrupted trade and shipping became unreliable in the borderlands where both sides struggled to maintain control. Men who "laid out" near their homes tried to contribute to their family's income and continue the family

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[17] Harrison Letters to his Wife, August 1, 1861, and October 12, 1861, Randolph Harrison Papers, VHS; Diary of Nimrod Bramham Hamner, Hamner Family Papers, VHS; Flavius Josephus Ashburn, Sunday May 17, 1862, Flavius Josephus Ashburn Diary, WVA; Conway Robinson Howard Letter, March 20, 1864, Conway Robinson Howard Papers, VHS.

[18] Unknown to Sallie W. Blue, October 29, 1870, Blue Family Papers, VHS; "Recollections," Scrapbook, Lewis County, ca. 1910, WVA.

trade as best as they could, but safety concerns limited how effective their attempts could be. In southwestern Virginia, where the Confederate government maintained control through the duration of the war, government policies contributed to the economic suffering and intensified Unionist sentiment among the populace.[19]

The lingering presence of the Union and Confederate armies had an even greater negative impact on civilian life than any of these other hardships. Both armies purposefully brought suffering on those who disagreed with their government, but even sympathetic civilians had cause to worry when the army came through. In Lewis County, store owners complained that every store suffered during Confederate raids—their shelves were cleared of provisions and rare payments were only made in Confederate currency. A Unionist in the Kanawha Valley grumbled about the antics of the southern soldiers when they occupied the Valley, recounting "they stole one poor Union mans horse while one of his children was dying; he is left in a bad condition. he only had one horse and a large family. …I can't mention all of the other meanness they have done indeed I almost blush to see Virginians do so but what better can we expect of Persons that open rebel against our Government."[20]

One Confederate soldier admitted to his family that even though they often had no rations issued to them, they never went hungry, especially when they were in counties full of Union sympathizers. He derisively wrote that they "had little respect for the orchards or potato patches of Virginians who had denied their country."[21] Another soldier acknowledged in late 1862 on a raid through western Virginia into eastern Kentucky how common stealing had become for the remaining Confederate forces in the area:

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[19] Reynolds, "A Pragmatic Loyalty," 34.

[20] "Recollections," Scrapbook, Lewis County, ca. 1910, WVA; Civil War Diary, October 10, 1861, Blundon & Matthews Families Papers, WVA.

[21] Richmond Lewis Scott, 1861, Richmond Lewis Scott Letter, VHS: 2.

In this Expedition we captured from the Union men…150 cattle, and about the same number of horses, and brought them off. It was rather an unceremonious way of acting, but without "leave or license", we deprived every Union man of his last horse and ox, leaving only the milch cows…but unfeeling as this seems it is but gentle retaliation for the treatment of loyal Southerners by our enemies. We burnt no houses,—we murdered no unfortunate captive,—practices as familiar to the Yankees as eating their daily means in this region.[22]

In addition to stealing, armies also destroyed property they could not take with them. As the Confederate cavalry raided towns along the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in May 1862, a resident recorded that "reliable reports" reached him that "several parts of West Virginia have been destroyed within the last few days by the rebels." Whether those reports accurately reflected reality or not, the fear that such reports brought remained with civilians. A couple of days later that same resident wrote, "Some…are thrown into great consternation in consequence of what has been and may yet be done by the rebel army."[23]

As the statehood movement for West Virginia gained momentum, the presence of the Confederate army in the area did little to create sympathy for the southern government. A Unionist in Charleston wrote to his brother that "In some of the counties east from here—say Fayette, Greenbrier, Raleigh, Nicholas and others—[the rebels] have ate everything that they could get hold of. They ate all the corn when it was yet green in the rosneers [roasting ears] and all the wheat, potatoes, cattle and hogs. So that the people there will have to leave or starve this winter." He then expressed his opinion that it would be useless for the Confederacy to try to hold on to western Virginia. A southern soldier even admitted in a letter to his father that the Confederate Army brought hardships on the people. As the army headed into the mountains from the Shenandoah Valley, he wrote that "there are a set of thieves about our army which should by all means be restricted and punished. They take chickens, turkeys, pigs & vegitables without

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[22] Micajah Woods to My Dear Father, December 16, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA.
[23] Flavius Josephus Ashburn, May 5, 1862 and May 7, 1862, Flavius Josephus Ashburn Diary, WVA.

leave or license. Many horses also have been stolen. The people will have to endure these things wherever the army goes, for in every large body of men there are rogues and rascals."[24]

Some members of the Confederate army even went as far as to kill those residents who sided with the Union. In 1861 near Abingdon in southwestern Virginia, Captain Vincent Witcher learned that Reubin Thomas, a civilian, was rumored to entertain Unionist feelings and provide assistance to those he agreed with. Witcher, who did not hide his hope to resign from the organized army and raise a guerrilla band, took a small group of men in civilian clothing to Thomas's house where they pretended to be a group of Unionists. Thomas gave them information he had on the Union army and offered what help he could provide. Witcher then revealed his true identity and ordered his men to shoot Thomas. When they refused to kill a man in cold blood, Witcher drew his gun and completed the order himself. Stories and rumors of stories like Reubin Thomas's helped to create an atmosphere of fear throughout the entire region and made many mountaineers loathed to leave their families alone, even when their safety dictated they do so.[25]

The Confederate Army was not alone in contributing to the upheaval of civilian life. The Federal Army also left destruction and poverty in its wake. Two sisters corresponding with their aunt in September 1861 shared accounts of how Union occupation had affected extended family members. Eliza Ann Wood wrote that "Cousin Mary is very much distressed because she cannot get home she says that she might just as well go home and be killed by the Northerns as to stay from home so long she says she will dy if she dont get home. The Northerns have been at their house and have destroyed every thing that they had." On the other side of the same letter, her

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[24] Solomon Minsker to John Minsker, March 12, 1862, Minsker Family Papers, WVA; Micajah Woods to My Dear Father, June 21, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA.

[25] McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 98.

sister Mary Jane added, "Cousin Joe Morris family seven in all are still here— They are deprived of home + clothes almost—Didnt bring anything with them. The Yankees have everything they had even to knives + spoons."[26]

Rebecca Van Meter wrote in her diary in February 1862 that her family was afraid to leave the house because they had no way of knowing when the Yankees might pass through and destroy everything. As it was, the last time they had passed though, they had only left the family with one horse "to go to church with." In late 1862, the Confederacy's Assistant Secretary of War wrote to Brigadier General Humphrey Marshall, then in charge of troops in southwestern Virginia, that citizens had notified him that Union soldiers "turn cattle and horses (such is the information) upon the pastures of the farmers of the country without even asking permission. They take grain and forage wherever they find it without measuring or weighing it, and fix their own prices upon it. In a country covered with timber they burn the rails which inclose the farms." He recommended that any enemy soldier captured in such acts lose recognition as a soldier and the right to be treated as a prisoner of war.[27]

Such threats did little to alleviate the destruction. Jane Bennett, a resident of Harrison County in the solidly Unionist northern part of the state, recorded in her diary in August 1863 that "The Yankees came today and burned our home. They also took 100 head of cattle, 13 horses, and 50 head of sheep." In April 1864 the family once again fell prey to Union soldiers. Bennett's short entry relates that "A regiment of Yankee soldiers came here last night. Stayed all night, and left this morning for Beverly. They were a grand set of rascals, stealing everything that was loose, even to robbing the henroosts."[28]

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26 Sisters to My Dear Aunt, September 23, 1861, West Virginia Correspondence, VT.
27 Rebecca Van Meter, February 22, 1862, Van Meter Diary, WVA; John A. Campbell to Humphrey Marshall, November 10, 1862, *OR*, Series I, XX (2), 397.
28 Jane Bennett, August 2, 1863 and April 4, 1864, Aunt Jane Bennett Diary, WVA.

The Union army also participated in the destruction of property that residents remembered long after the war ended. Even small, seemingly unimportant occurrences were passed down to later generations. A newspaper collecting recollections of the war in Lewis County related that "While he was stationed there during early part of war, Rutherford B. Hayes at one time and in some manner killed a valuable dog which belonged to a Er. Ralston. This aroused some feeling among locals." In their postwar petition to Congress for compensation in 1866, West Virginia loyalists noted that "even the ordinary pursuits indispensable to their comfort and existence" had been interrupted by the Union army, and that "…many…churches, court houses, not to mention private property have been injured and destroyed."[29]

In November 1863, Confederate soldier Micajah Woods wrote to his father about their relatives in the town of Lewisburg. He related that the last he heard all were safe, but that after the Union army occupied the town "they burnt the Southern Methodist Church and several large houses on Main Street which had been devoted to government purposes. I learned that two or three private residences were also burned but whose they were I have not heard." Tazewell County suffered a worse fate by the end of the war. A former resident wrote to his family that it was much changed from his childhood, and that he was sorry to see it such a "lonesome and dreary looking place."[30]

Those towns that avoided destruction or theft of property often still suffered from a hit to their food supply. Farmers in the Valley of the Kanawha lost most of their grain without reimbursement in 1862 when the Union Army marched through and never received any reimbursement. As Confederate troops followed the Union Army east from the mountains,

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[29] "Recollections," Scrapbook, Lewis County, ca. 1910s, WVA; Petition to Congress, January 25, 1866, Kellian Van Rensalear Papers, Section 2, VHS.

[30] Micajah Woods to My Dear Father, Sunday November 8, 1863, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA; A. C. M. A. Hansard to Dear Brother and Family, February 24, 1865, A. C. M. A. Hansard Papers, VT.

Micajah Woods relayed a sad picture to his mother:

> It demands an abler pen than mine to narrate the misfortune & troubles which people on the road have had to endure. When the Yankees held the country before, the people fared tolerably well, but on this trip horses & farms indiscriminately have been laid to waste. Neither men nor women have been spared. All corn, all flour, all vegitables, everything that could be eaten or carried away has been taken. Ladies have been insulted wherever found, their houses entered, sideboards & drawers robbed before their eyes. Even the steel knives & forks have been seized en masse. Fortunately the suffering has been limited chiefly to the road.[31]

In Fayetteville, the Federal Army was not harsh to Confederate sympathizers as long as they remained at home and were guarded in what they said and did. After Confederates attempted to retake the town in 1864, Union officials ordered that the secessionists either take the Oath of Allegiance or be faced with imprisonment. They also burned the grist-mills, which made life for the residents much harder after that. To turn their grain into flour they had to rely on a primitive and time consuming hand-mill.[32]

Some civilians did suffer imprisonment at the hands of the Union Army. In Moorefield in August 1863 a resident recorded how an engagement between Union Cavalry and Confederate guerrillas had resulted in capture of several secessionist citizens. Just as the actions of the Confederate army strengthened unionism in the areas that experienced them, so the actions of the Union Army in counties filled with secessionist sentiment helped to solidify southern support. Many secessionists believed the violation of private property by the army was a sign of what life would be like if the Confederacy lost the war. These experiences created a deep hatred and sense of injustice in the minds of many southerners and contributed to a lingering loyalty to the Confederacy that otherwise may have waned much sooner.[33]

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[31] R. T. Harvey Letter, March 3, 1864, Kellian Van Rensalear Papers, Section 1, VHS; Micajah Woods to My Dear Mother, Sunday June 15, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA.

[32] Bibb, "Fayetteville in the Civil War," 3.

[33] Rebecca Van Meter, August 1, 1863, Van Meter Diary, WVA; Blair, *Private War*, 56; Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 2, 77-78.

While the challenges of travel on poor roads, delays in the postal system, economic difficulties, and the presence of organized armies created an environment that caused many scouters to wish to remain as close to home as possible, their loved ones often experienced additional hardships because of their presence. Home guards often had the responsibility to catch deserters or draft-evaders, but the guard members' extreme youth or age put them at a disadvantage against trained men. Many guards, therefore, turned to a more accessible and less threatening target: the men's families. Because scouters had a difficult time subsisting off the land without the help of their families, those attempting to track them down looked to end that support through whatever means necessary. They burned homes, killed livestock, and stole valuables. They also arrested or punished suspected perpetrators without sufficient evidence; therefore, merely being related to a scouter left civilians open to attack, regardless of whether or not that relation offered any help.[34]

In the face of these growing challenges, some families chose to flee to a more stable environment. Many resisted this at first, not wanting to be thought of as "cowards," unable to fight, who ran to "troops for protection." Those who did flee often had to leave all of their possessions behind. Sympathetic to their plight, some citizens offered the opportunity for these refugees to spend the night in their homes. Those with Unionist sympathies typically fled north, while those who held secessionist views took a southern route; however, the direction was often ultimately dictated by the location of friends or relatives who offered shelter. As residents fled, soldiers began to discuss what to do with their abandoned property. A Union soldier in Monroe County believed that Unionists in the area should benefit materially when their neighbors fled to

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[34] Dotson, "Grave and Scandalous," 429-430; Paludan, *Victims,* 75; Noel C. Fisher, "Feelin' Mighty Southern: Recent Scholarship on Southern Appalachia in the Civil War," *Civil War History* 47:4 (Dec. 2001): 338.

the Confederacy, and often that was the course Union officials took.[35]

Many Unionists in the southern counties of western Virginia experienced the same urge to flee as their secessionist counterparts in the northern counties. One Unionist in the Kanawha Valley recorded in her diary that as the Confederate Army moved into the valley in September 1862, Union families began to move down the river. Once the Confederates began to press men of fighting age into the service, several of her neighbors opted to go to Ohio to escape them. A Confederate soldier echoed that observation in a letter to his sister, noting, "some neighbourhoods in this country is entirely deserted as they left their corn and evry thing and went off with the yankeys when the yankeys retreated from Charleston…." In Fayette County that same year, Laban Gwinn, his wife Mary Jane, and their two children became Union refugees who moved to Indiana for the duration of the war. His military passes show the effort families who crossed state lines had to go through to ensure safe passage. Gwinn's first pass allowed the family to ride on government boats to reach Ohio, while the second permitted them to pass through Union lines into Indiana. The family returned to Fayette County at the end of the war, but many other refugees never had the opportunity to return to their old homes.[36]

Unionists in the Sandy Basin especially found that to be the case. They were a visible minority at the beginning of the war, so their community took steps to enforce conformity. One vocal Unionist had to sell out and leave the area under pressure from his neighbors, while another joined the Confederate militia rather than risk retaliation for his views. Many Unionists who did not conform were whipped, arrested, and imprisoned. Unionists in neighboring

[35] Civil War Diary, Feb. 11, 1862, Blundon & Matthews Families Papers, WVA; Randolph Harrison to his Wife, August 10, 1861, Randolph Harrison Papers, VHS; William Whig Loring Letter, August 24, 1862, William Whig Loring Papers, LVA.

[36] Civil War Diary, September 14, 1861 and September 22, 1862, Blundon & Matthews Families Papers, WVA; Henry C. Carpenter to My Dear Sister, September 26, 1862, Henry C. Carpenter Papers, VT; McKinney, *Fayette County*, 142-143.

Kentucky sent word that those loyal to the Union were welcome there, and many Unionist families in the Sandy Basin accepted the offer. Sandy Basin's town of Open Fork saw a minor exodus of Unionists to Kentucky, due mainly to the efforts of two woman: Peggy Yates Hale and her sister-in-law, Polly Taylor Yates. Peggy's husband, Jim, and his brother deserted a local regiment and fled to Kentucky with two other local deserters. When the Confederates threatened Peggy and her family for Jim's desertion, she led her family, her father's family, and her father-in-law's family to safety to Kentucky. When more men from Jim's regiment deserted and hid out in the woods near their community, Zeke Counts, the man who had initially raised the company, went after them. He arrested one, Ike Blair, but Blair escaped. After being shot by one of Counts's friends and surviving his wound, Blair took his brothers to the woods for safety. In retaliation for the desertions, Counts and other Confederate sympathizers terrorized and robbed the Blairs, Taylors, Hales, and Yateses who remained in the area. Polly Taylor Yates returned from Kentucky for her widowed sister, but found she was suspected of being a spy. She was safely hidden by some Hales, and she she eventually led another small migration of Taylors, Hales, and Wrights to Kentucky. By late 1863, the Unionists around Open Fork were all cowed, in hiding, or safely across the Kentucky state line.[37]

Not all those who were threatened had the chance or desire to flee, however. When the opportunity presented itself, some civilians chose to fight. Not all who made that choice were in a guerrilla band or forced to live in the hills; therefore, the guerrilla conflict in western Virginia was a "People's War" in its most literal definition. Old Virginian and mountain traditions of independence and pride were largely responsible for this attitude, as exemplified by a Mrs. Holmes who lived near Wyoming Court House. One soldier who met her described her modest

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[37] Mann, "Family Group," 380-382.

house as something "One would never suppose…was the domicile of the one of the smartest, most intelligent & intellectual woman of all the land." Although she was "clothed in linen" and without sugar or coffee, "destitute of all luxuries & many conveniences, she exhibited such independence of character that I could but rightly admire her." He spoke of her "determination never to seek refugee from the Yankees, but to stand her ground & act the Va. lady of old, proud to show what she could submit to for liberty & independence."[38]

That same spirit, manifested in other civilians, led to notable occurrences throughout western Virginia. In the days following the attack on Fort Sumter, a Maryland resident wrote to a friend that 1,500 secessionists at Shephardstown, Virginia, a few miles north of Harpers Ferry, gathered and began "guarding the bridge wich crosses the Potomac to prevent government troops from crossing…thare are too thousand at harpers ferry and have pipes all inn the bridge full of powder ready to set a mach to it as soon as goverment tryes to cross[.] it is clear hell you may de pend the families are…taking all the strangers the come a cross that cant tell whare the are going…" While the Marylander may have exaggerated the details, his account shows the willingness of the citizens in those towns to defend themselves, which accurately reflects other experiences that occurred throughout western Virginia for the duration of the war.[39]

Cabell County citizens in Guyandotte, part of present day Huntington, West Virginia, demonstrated this when their town became the target of a Confederate raid in November 1861. Cabell County was a secessionist hotspot and reluctant host of a Union recruit camp. Many Unionists saw their property and livestock stolen as retaliation against their beliefs, and some were forced to cross the river into Kentucky or flee further into Ohio for safety. The surprise Confederate attack on the camp on November 10 caught the Union troops and recruits off guard.

[38] Micajah Woods to My Dear Mother, Nov. 13, 1862, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA.
[39] S.D. Maughmer, April 15, 1861, S.D. Maughmer Letter, LVA.

As they fled through the streets in disarray, many contemporary accounts recounted that several local citizens shot at them. Some even claimed that the Guyandotte citizens had foreknowledge of the attack and had furnished intelligence to the Confederate cavalry on the eve of the raid. The citizens of Guyandotte became the victims of one of the war's earliest acts of retaliatory destruction when Union troops burned the town for their suspected collaboration with the Confederate raiders and their reputation for being strong secessionists.[40]

In June 1863 residents in Washington County stood together to protect their town from a band of twenty-five "tory" raiders from eastern Tennessee. Editors of the *Abingdon Virginian* commended nearly 100 locals for their quick response in countering the raiding party and forcing their retreat. The newspaper quoted a local citizen as saying "it was truly refreshing to see the zeal manifested by the old white-headed men, when volunteers were called for…the young men who could stand tamely by must be destitute of manliness indeed, or else…a tory."[41]

Civilian heroics also emerged in Wytheville in Wythe County the following month. The Union army raided the town to burn it, which enraged citizens to action. A Union officer later remembered, "As the soldiers, citizens, and even the women fired from their houses, both public and private, we burned the town to ashes." The civilian resistance, however, forced the Union troops to retreat. The women of the town then intervened to stop a massacre of the Union soldiers that had became trapped in the town, ensuring the men were taken as prisoners of war instead. When Powell, the highest ranking Union officer in the town, became the focal point of the citizens' anger, the women conspired to hide him safely in the Kincannon Hotel until he could be transferred to prison. The Union raiders retreated through nearby Tazewell County, where they met with additional resistance. At the mouth of Cove Creek, a small number of

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40 Joe Geiger, Jr., "The Tragic Fate of Guyandotte," *West Virginia History Journal* 54 (1995): 28.
41 Shaffer, *Washington County*, 69; *Abingdon Virginian*, June 26, 1863.

Confederate soldiers and Tazewell citizens charged the Union rear guard, killing several soldiers and capturing a number of men and horses. Later that day, a Federal officer on the retreat stopped by a house in Tazewell and requested dinner, which resident Mattie Hendrick willingly offered. When he set his carbine down to eat, she confiscated the rifle and held him prisoner until a squad of Confederate soldiers came and arrested him.[42]

In August 1863, a Federal raiding party crossing through Tazewell County was thwarted by another heroic woman. When the raiders stopped to water their horses, they were discovered by Patsy Hall. The men had been hoping to cross the countryside undetected, but decided they had nothing to fear from a woman. They made her take an oath that she would not give their presence away, and she submitted without complaint. She, however, did not consider the oath binding, and once they had moved on she notified the Tazewell Troopers, the area's home guard, about their presence. The guard followed the raiders and alerted the citizens of nearby Marion. Twenty citizens armed themselves and hunted down the Union raiders near Chatham Hill, where they scattered the band and captured a couple of prisoners.[43]

While many citizens were willing to take up arms when necessary and thereby became a small part of the People's War, many scouters who lay out near their homes were motivated to remain near their families to survive, fight when and how they thought best, and help protect their towns and counties during turbulent times. The goals of these guerrillas closely matched the sentiments that motivated them. They aspired to remain near their families, stay hidden from pursuers, and protect their homes from the region's upheaval.

Those who sought their family's safety had to rely on what tools they had available to try

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[42] F. E. Franklin, V. M. Johnson, Sam Jones, J. M. Wharey, "Recollections of the Wytheville Raid," *Confederate Veterans Magazine* 7 (July 1909): 72; Walker, *War in Southwest Virginia*, 55; William Cecil Pendleton, *History of Tazewell and Southwest Virginia: 1748-1920* (Richmond, VA: W. C. Hill Printing Company, 1920), 619-621.
[43] Pendleton, *History of Tazewell*, 622-623.

to ensure it. Two escaped slaves who made their way to Union lines in January 1862 reported

that on their way through Lewisburg, they encountered 5-12 men guarding the road, armed with

nothing more than old squirrel rifles and old muskets. Scouters sometimes had to rely on others

to look out for the well-being of their family when times of trouble forced them to leave their

homes. A Kanawha Valley diarist, whose Unionist father was forced to flee when the

Confederates occupied the Valley, expressed his sadness in April 1862 that his father could not

be home and had to stay in a "very dangerous country." In September of that year he recorded

that a company of "Rebels" were rumored to be marching toward the Valley again, and that many

Union men "were running off into the woods." His father sent six men to check on his family to

see if the rebels had disturbed them. He concluded his entry with "He is so uneasy about us. Oh,

I wish the detestable rebels would stay away…."[44]

The scouters whose main goal was to remain safe from pursuers at times faced a difficult

task in the face of determined conscription officers or those assigned to track down deserters.

While these efforts to capture scouters often failed, some succeeded; therefore, many guerrillas

took a pro-active approach to discourage pursuers. Citizens who reported deserters' activities

often found their homes mysteriously burned or they themselves maimed or killed by a

particularly vindictive scouter. In some areas, poorer members of the community who were

forced to scout for holding political beliefs contrary to those of the community were often

tracked down and forced to leave if they tried to remain in the area. However, some scouters

could get away with only token compliance if they had important family connections. A Sandy

Basin resident named Pres Mullins spent the war hiding on Cumberland Mountain just miles

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[44] Lt. Col. Elliott to Capt. G. M. Bascom, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of
Occupation of West Virginia, January 14, 1862, RG 393, NARA; Civil War Diary, April 15, 1862, September 7,
1862 and September 10, 1862, Blundon and Matthews Families Papers, WVA.

from his house. His position and his neighbors' protection secured his safety, although his Unionists views did not permit him to live openly at home in his secessionist community. As the war progressed, he began sheltering two poorer Unionist neighbors, ensuring their safety through the end of the conflict. At the conclusion of the war he calmly returned home and paid his Confederate neighbors for the beef he had stolen from them. For the rest of his life he treated the whole thing as a joke. As Mullins's story illustrates, those with the support of some of the locals were often able to more successfully scout than those without many connections.[45]

When mountaineers felt their home or community was threatened, some took daring steps to counter that. In the fall of 1861, when word reached Fayetteville that Federal troops were approaching, two men armed only with rifles hid in the woods just off the road west of the town. When the advance guard reached the spot, the two men sprung from their hiding place and apprehended two soldiers who were slightly in front of the others. The civilians hurried their prisoners through the woods to a neighbor's house, where they kept them until they could safely take them south to the Confederate lines as prisoners of war.[46]

Although many mountaineers were forced to hide out in the areas around their homes for self-preservation with defensive goals, the official authorities in Richmond and Washington rarely distinguished between these guerrillas and the more destructive marauders who terrorized the land for personal advancement. To complicate things even further, two different state capitals claimed jurisdiction over the same territory. The governments in Richmond and Wheeling arrested civilians over alleged political offenses under the accusation of treason. When militarily in control of the area, both governments apprehended noncombatants and imprisoned them, forcing them to take the oath of allegiance to secure their release. This practice added to the

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[45] Dotson, "Grave and Scandalous," 412; Mann, "Family Group," 381.
[46] Bibb, "Fayetteville in the Civil War," 2.

confusion surrounding the governments' policies concerning these scouters.[47]

The Union policy regarding the more defensively-minded guerrillas included keeping troops in western Virginia to offer protection and keep the populace loyal, and encouraging citizens to rise up and protect themselves. In December 1861 Governor Pierpont approved a request from General Cox to allow a Unionist in Logan County to raise a volunteer company "to protect the vicinity from marauders and enemies of this government [the Restored Government of Virginia] and the U.S. government." The army also did what it could to thwart any secessionist attempt to follow the same advice. On July 25, 1862, General Cox received a notice from Colonel Lightborn that discussed disarming the citizens of Charleston. "It is reported here that the Secessionists here or those who sympathize with them are armed. I have thought it best to take possession of every arm if this meets your approval. Will do so tomorrow if we are not attacked tonight."[48]

General Rosecrans's proclamation to the "Loyal Citizens of Western Virginia" in August 1861 included warnings against guerrillas driven by all three types of motivators. To combat those whose primary goal was self-preservation, he urged both action and cooperation:

> I…earnestly exhort you to take the most prompt and vigorous measures to put a stop to neighborhood and private wars. You must remember that the laws are suspended in Eastern Virginia, which has transferred itself to the Southern Confederacy. The old constitution and laws of Virginia are only in force in Western Virginia. These laws you must maintain.

> Let every citizen, without reference to past political opinions, unite with his neighbors to keep these laws in operation, and thus prevent the country from being desolated by plunder and violence, whether committed in the name of secessionism or Unionism.

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[47] Johnston, *History of the Middle New River Settlements*, 200.

[48] Henry Samuels to Brig. Gen. Cox, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, Dec. 18, 1861, RG 393, NARA; Col. Lightborn to Cox, Letters Received, 1861-1863, District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of West Virginia, "Charleston 25," RG 393, NARA.

…Put a stop to needless arrests and the spread of malicious reports. Let each town and district choose five of its most reliable and energetic citizens a committee of public safety, to act in concert with the civic and military authorities and be responsible for the preservation of peace and good order.[49]

By early 1862, the Union army relied on loyal citizens to control western Virginia. Union bands, such as the Mountain Marksmen, knew the habits of guerrillas and were as familiar with the terrain as those they were tracking. Whole communities pledged to put down "guerrillaism, in all its phases" and requested permission to to use guerrilla tactics to do so. Whether or not the permission was granted, they became involved in bushwhacking both Confederate troops and their secessionist neighbors with Union encouragement.[50]

The Confederate government also passed legislation to address disloyalty, which supported secessionists' efforts against Unionists in the areas the South controlled, and it took steps to capture deserters. These efforts were more impactful to these types of guerrillas in western Virginia than steps the Union army took against desertion, since most deserters in the area who primarily resorted to a guerrilla lifestyle for self-preservation were from the Confederate army. Communities in Confederate-controlled areas often petitioned the government for assistance against deserters and Unionists, and in southwestern Virginia Confederate authorities continually persecuted them. By late 1864, citizens from Roanoke and Floyd counties felt threatened enough by the growing numbers of these deserter groups that they asked for additional militia support to counter them.[51]

As the war progressed, many communities helped counter desertion by not welcoming deserters as freely, and some churches even excommunicated members who had left the army without official approval. Some organized troops from western Virginia had been effective early

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[49] W. S. Rosecrans to the Loyal Citizens of Western Virginia, August 20, 1861, *OR*, Series I, V: 575-577.
[50] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 87, 97.
[51] Reynolds, "A Pragmatic Loyalty," 37, 62.

in the war at tracking down runaways, since, as one soldier noted, "…they think when they get home over in the mountains they are safe, [but] I know the roads and trails as they call them as well as [they do]…." With the Confederacy's declining fortunes on the battlefields and its focus shifting away from large engagements in western Virginia, the area relied more heavily on militia and civilians to respond to deserters. In Franklin County a deserter band formed whose members subsisted on local farms to survive. Aggravated by their actions, a group of civilians from Franklin Court House tracked two of their members to a cave eight miles outside of town, and fired fifty-one rounds at them to ensure they could not possibly survive the encounter. To hunt down the rest of the band, which lived along the Franklin and Floyd county line, the conscription officer for the county placed guards at the passes to the "fort" they had built and enlisted the help of the Floyd County home guard. The trap was successful and the Floyd Guard captured 60-70 guerrillas at the loss of two of their own men killed and four wounded. The following month many of the jailed deserters were freed by their armed comrades, led by Darius E. Williams, a deserter from the 24th Virginia Infantry, and the community took steps to ensure the deserters would not take retaliatory attempts against them. Rachel Turner hid corn in the walls and ceiling of her home to safeguard her food, while David Goodykoontz and his family made portholes in their home that would allow them to shoot at gang members should they attack.[52]

With the measures both governments took to address the existence of these guerrillas, their high commands also strove to win the trust of the citizens these policies affected. At the beginning of engagements in 1861, Robert E. Lee sent a note to F. M. Boykin in which he reminded the Major that the objective of holding the roads was to benefit the states of Maryland

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[52] James W. Silver, *Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda* (New York: Norton, 1967), 75; Joseph Hubbard Wilson Letter, January 15, 1862, Joseph Hubbard Wilson Papers, VHS; Blair, *Private War*, 92; Dotson, "Grave and Scandalous," 412.

and Virginia, not the citizens. However, he added, "you will also endeavor to give quiet & security to the inhabitants of the country." Assistant Adjutant-General Halpine in the Union army echoed that same sentiment three years later when he called Major General Stahel's attention to the conduct of some of the soldiers in his command who engaged in unauthorized pillaging. He called these actions "dangerous to the commands" in a country "infested by guerrillas parties," and told the Major General to take steps to ensure these "wanton outrages and injuries [not] be inflicted upon any people" so that the army could keep the people's trust.[53]

Determining the effectiveness of this group of guerrillas motivated by self-preservation is challenging, since their goals were mostly defensive in nature. One clear success occurred in Floyd County, where deserters banded together and overthrew the Confederate authority and established a Unionist stronghold. The area had become known as "Sisson's Kingdom" after a large Unionist family that lived there. Many members had enlisted in the Confederate army and then deserted, and other family members and friends openly defied attempts by the southern authorities to capture them, providing warnings and information to their kin about deserter hunters. In October 1862 Rebecca Blackwell sent her eight-year-old son Isaac to blow a horn whenever home guards entered the area as a warning to her older son, Abraham, to allow him to escape capture. While age kept Isaac Blackwell safe from punishment, other children were not so fortunate. In the fall of 1864, Aley Kinsey warned her son-in-law Robert Huff that the deserter hunters were closing in on him, and she was promptly arrested along with her nine-year-old son for her actions.[54]

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[53] Robert E. Lee to Major F. M. Boykin, April 30, 1861, Mary Ober (Boykin) Gatewood Papers, VHS; Chas. G. Halpine to Maj. Gen. Julius Stahel, May 30, 1864, *OR*, Series I, XXXVII (1), 555-556.

[54] Reynolds, "A Pragmatic Loyalty," 62; Paul Randolph Dotson, Jr. "Sisson's Kingdom: Loyalty Divisions in Floyd County, Virginia, 1861-1865" (Master's Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1997), 2, 41, 45.

The Floyd County deserters lived in bands for protection and sustenance and attacked conscription officers that came through the county. The strength of the Heroes of America increased in the county during the winter of 1863-1864, and by the next fall most of the area's deserters had joined the secret Unionist society and began to vie for political control of the county. When southern sympathizers tried to take on this group, a guerrilla conflict began that plunged the county into anarchy. The Confederate government sent reserves under the command of Lieutenant John S. Wise to capture or drive out as many deserters as he could. He complained that the deserters' relatives openly hindered his troops' efforts, and his soldiers were only able to capture a few dozen men. The residents' firm commitment to their families caused many of them to turn against the Confederacy, ultimately assuring the removal of the county as a productive portion of the Confederate homefront.[55]

While Floyd County's deserters managed to overcome their Confederate pursuers with the assistance of family members and the county's Unionist population, the success of other runaways, conscription evaders, or civilians fleeing vindictive political opponents varied widely. Some were able to survive the war and offer some assistance to their families while they were hiding out. Others were captured, driven from the state, or killed by their pursuers. While independent resistance movements were usually futile, success could sometimes be achieved in numbers. By May 1864 the Union had discovered it was impossible to secure the conquered territory in western Virginia, and when the Federals tried to establish pro-Union local governments, "rebel banditti" rose up against loyal citizens, forcing them to flee to the mountains to avoid capture or death.[56]

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[55] Dotson, "Grave and Scandalous," 393, 420; Dotson, "Sisson's Kingdom," 82-83. For an in-depth look at Floyd County during the Civil War and its descent into anarchy through the eventual Unionist victory, see Paul Randolph Dotson's 1997 Master's Thesis on the topic.

[56] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 236.

In the turbulent borderland region of western Virginia, neither Unionists nor secessionists had surety that they could get through the conflict unscathed, and those who were forced to flee their homes or found they could not safely return to them had no guarantee that turning to defensive tactics in the mountains would ensure survival. Their involvement in the guerrilla war overshadowed their unique and less sinister motivations and goals, and unfairly connected them to the guerrillas who were motivated by greed or vengeance. While some did devolve to that level, the government, the military, and the general population failed to distinguish between the different characteristics that shaped their involvement as a whole. Many communities in western Virginia were torn apart and their social structure weakened by ideological differences, but the basic impact of the war in Appalachia Virginia was a tightening of family loyalty, since kinship often dictated whether a resident sought to assist or impede a deserter, draft-evader, or civilian who held minority political views. The strong bound of kinship was indicative of mountaineers throughout the region and was not confined to just the area that remained loyal to Virginia or the group of counties that split into West Virginia. While national and state matters concerned those who lived in the region, family ties dictated action.[57]

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[57] Mann, "Family Group," 389.

CONCLUSION

In December 1862, eager Richmond patrons crowded into a theater to watch the first original drama staged in the Confederate States of America. *The Guerrillas*, written by James Dabney McCabe Jr., portrayed Union General John C. Frémont's campaign against a band of guerrillas operating in the mountains of western Virginia. A second, fictional, Union officer, the principle antagonist, embarked on a futile chase of Arthur Douglas, the captain of the guerrillas, who outwitted his opponents at every turn. Enraged by their failures, the federals turned their revenge on civilians. They made lewd advances toward young maidens, hung innocent citizens, and burned houses on their violent rampage. At the end of the play, Douglas and his men ultimately emerged victorious, and the southern hero boasted the Confederates' foes "shall rue the hour they encounter the Guerrillas."[1]

Wartime culture and entertainment reflected the turbulence of the era. Unsurprisingly, the play focused on irregular warfare and not organized troops or campaigns because, for many in the Confederacy, that was the war. What Frémont and other Union officials failed to grasp, however, was that guerrillas did not all fight for the same reasons. By failing to identify different motivations, the Union was never able to effectively answer western Virginia guerrillas whether they fought for political and military purposes, personal advancement, or self-preservation.

Evaluating guerrillas by motivation offers a clearer interpretation of the complexity of western Virginia's guerrilla warfare than the traditional categorical breakdown of raiders, partisans, and guerrillas provides in at least four ways. First, it helps to differentiate between guerrillas involved in irregular warfare against outside invaders and those who participated primarily against their own neighbors. Next, it also provides answers for why irregular warfare

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[1] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 162-163.

grew so common in the mountainous region. Third, considering irregular warfare from the guerrillas' point of view explains why civilians assisted some guerrillas when they were victimized by others. Finally, such an approach correlates naturally to the way the irregular war in western Virginia progressed. At the beginning of the war, most guerrillas fought for a cause, answering the Union or Confederacy's invasion into the area based on the partisan heritage they received from their forefathers in the American Revolution. That heritage lent itself to the ideals of democracy, individualism, and independence. This independent nature of fighting eventually grew out of control and deteriorated, although guerrillas who fought for a political cause never completely disappeared. The escalating lawlessness and violence corresponded with governments shifting their attention away from western Virginia and provided a suitable environment for guerrillas who fought for personal advancement. As the area deteriorated into anarchy, many civilians were forced to take measures to protect themselves, sometimes implementing guerrilla warfare in order to effectively do so.[2]

Evaluating guerrillas in western Virginia according to motivation shows irregular warfare in that region had two distinct characteristics. First, it had direct origins in the American Revolution and in the militia mindset of the earliest Scotch-Irish settlers to the backcountry of Colonial America. This heritage made irregular warfare—both against invaders and between neighbors—natural responses for western Virginians of all ages. Second, guerrilla warfare developed out of a kin-centric mentality for mountaineers who placed more importance on community or local concerns than on state or national ones. Family relationships and pronounced localism drove guerrillas more than economics or geography. The creation of the state of West Virginia was the most successful example of mountaineers extolling local concerns above all

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[2] Noe, "Who Were the Bushwhackers?" 7, 10.

others, although not all of the residents who lived within the new state's borders were supportive of its statehood movement.

During the American Revolution, western Virginia differed from the rest of the backcountry for its notable lack of violence. This occurred because the extension of Virginia political institutions brought the region security before that stability existed in other mountain settlements. It is notable, then, that when western Virginia suffered from a breakdown in security after Virginia seceded from the Union in 1861, the region experienced the most immediate breakdown of law and order of any state in the Confederacy, since the Union army invaded it first. Federal officials, however, believed the war would be a short one and therefore did not initially try to establish civilian government in the region. Because of this, the area experienced the same type of violence and exploitation the other backcountries had experienced in the Revolution. For the descendants of Scotch-Irish settlers, the lack of a stable government offered the opportunity to exercise independence, for better or for worse.[3]

The Scotch-Irish heritage also instilled in mountaineers the importance of kin. Western Virginians had inherited a warrior ethic and family system from early backcountry settlers and their anarchic environment. From the beginnings of settlement westward of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, intense localism caused entire communities to unite behind prominent leaders, which explains why different areas within the same region held vastly differing views by the mid-nineteenth century. This localism also resulted in a self-sufficient mindset, which manifested itself during the war in various ways. For example, many communities showed an unwillingness to let their "boys" in the army rely on government or outside help for their

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[3] Warren R. Hofstra, "The Virginia Backcountry in the Eighteenth Century: The Question of Origins and the Issue of Outcomes" *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101:4 (Oct. 1993): 498-502; Mackey, *Uncivil War*, 98.

provisions; rather, they conducted their own campaigns to raise the food and supplies the soldiers

needed. Guerrillas who hoped to assist a political cause also displayed this localism, because

they enlisted in the guerrilla war—rather than the regular army—to protect their homes first and

benefit their cause second. Many western Virginians saw guerrilla warfare as a masculine

phenomenon that allowed them to defend their honor against the degrading tyranny of foreign

rule. Guerrillaism became a direct response to protect homes and families from enemy control.

Although raiders and partisans often conducted raids to strike where the enemy was weakest,

guerrillas and bushwhackers remained predominantly local phenomena. Out of all of the

bushwhackers the Union army captured in the central portion of western Virginia from

1861-1862, nearly all were arrested in the counties that the 1860 census recorded they resided,

and none were captured more than two counties away.[4]

Unlike the common Confederate soldier or younger bushwhackers in the western theater,

western Virginia's guerrillas had an average age in the mid-30s. This meant the guerrilla war was

not reserved only for the young and strong. Conducting guerrilla warfare required a fiercely

independent mentality, something mountaineers of all ages possessed. Guerrillas came from all

classes of society, including many who were middle-class—prosperous, educated, and respected

community leaders who had a personal stake in the war. Although national causes were

important to many of them, local concerns were more so. Intense partisan warfare defined the

mountaineers' Civil War experience, and was the result of local, state, and national competition

for loyalty.[5]

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[4] Fischer, *Albion's Seed,* 639; Hofstra, "Virginia Backcountry," 498; Blair, *Private War*, 37; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 30; Jonathan Dean Sarris, *A Separate War: Communities in Conflict in the Mountain South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 184; Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 47; Noe, "Who Were the Bushwhackers?" 20.

[5] Noe, "Who Were the Bushwhackers?" 17, 21; Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 86; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 195.

Local ties were evident in all western Virginians involved in guerrilla warfare. For those who fought for political purposes or for self-preservation, commitment to family guided their choices. For those who fought for self-advancement, the enticement of establishing local power played into the spite or vengeance that motivated them to become involved. Mountaineers supported a cause as long as it appealed to their sense of familial duty, but if more secure means of safeguarding their families arose, many did not hesitate to shift their allegiance. Because this mentality was present in Partisans Rangers, their support was often more troublesome to the Confederacy than it was beneficial; they often engaged in small guerrilla skirmishes to save their hometowns and did not keep their focus on fighting to support the Confederacy. Some guerrillas, including Anderson "Devil Anse" Hatfield and many who fought in the Sandy River Valley, deserted from the regular army specifically to return home and fight a local civil war. Due to the intense local nature of guerrilla warfare, the bloodshed that occurred was rarely random or impersonal, and the fighting was rooted in defending neighborhoods and family.[6]

While political convictions divided communities and sections of western Virginia, kinship and family ties made the guerrilla war between neighbors take on many elements of clan warfare. This made many try to settle accounts and dispense justice more quickly. Historian Kenneth Noe sums up the characteristics of guerrilla warfare in West Virginia this way:

> Support for the Confederacy or the Union at least during the war's 'original' phase in West Virginia, and perhaps in all of Appalachia, was much less a class uprising or a nihilistic thirst for violence than it was the expression of many different communities and their complex local kin ties, reciprocal patron-client relationships, economic structures, political leadership, fears, and neighborhood concerns, all arrayed against a political, cultural, and ideological backdrop of revolutionary heritage, republican ideology, sectional crisis, and Civil War that involved them as much as any other Americans. …Only the closer presence of the enemy, in nearby families and neighborhoods as well as occupying garrisons,

6 Dotson, "Grave and Scandalous," 394; McKnight, *Contested Borderlands*, 106; Noe, "Who Were the Bushwhackers?" 8; Mann, "Family Group," 374-375.

made their civil war an increasingly brutal neighborhood affair.[7]

The creation of the state of West Virginia marked the triumph of local concerns above all others. Those who lived in the northwestern portion of the state exerted their influence to create a political entity that was geared more toward their interests than they received from the state government in Richmond. Some Virginians from across the state supported the division of Virginia, as one eastern Virginian soldier recorded in his diary, "Although Western Virginia abounds in the grandest…scenery, I am perpetually disgusted with the [common people] and think we would be benefitted and not injured by a division of the state." Another soldier expressed surprise at the aversion residents in the northern portion of western Virginia showed the Confederate army, recording as he passed through Taylor County, "at that place we were saluted by no welcome smiles; no waving or handkerchiefs, but sullen derisive countenances told us plainly that we were in the enemy's country." In her recollections after the war, a West Virginia civilian expressed surprise that Virginia had remained unified for as long as it had. She wrote, "Our interest were so unlike the geographical lines so distinctly marked and the tastes, habits, and characters of the people so very different, they never should have remained so long together." Many western Virginians who had no desire to secede from the Union believed that any complaints they had were directed more toward the eastern slaveholding portion of Virginia than against their nonslaveholding neighboring states, especially in areas whose economies matched that sentiment, as well.[8]

Not all Virginians were amiable to the idea, though. Some expressed disagreement with a state division, at times vehemently. A loyal congressman from western Virginia, who argued

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[7] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 86, 236; Noe, "Who Were the Bushwhackers?" 26.

[8] Nimrod Hamner Diary, July 1861, Hamner Family Papers, VHS; John Lyon Hill, August 9, 1862, John Lyon Hill Diary, VHS; "Recollections," Scrapbook, Lewis County, ca. 1910s, WVA; James Clyde McGregor, *The Disruption of Virginia* (United States: Macmillian, 1922), 70-74.

against Virginia's secession from the Union, also argued against his district's secession from Virginia. He insisted that eastern and western Virginia had no separate interests and predicted that a split would only result in lawlessness and anarchy. He pleaded in a letter to one of his constituents, "let us remain one and united, so that when the union shall be reconstructed, we shall be once more a band of brothers." When western Virginian and former Virginia governor Henry Wise heard that the unprecedented act of West Virginia statehood would occur, he crudely exploded that West Virginia's statehood was "the bastard offspring of political rape."[9]

The threat of regions or communities breaking away from Virginia, however, did not first emerge during the Civil War. Areas of western Virginia had voiced such sentiment leading up to the 1850 constitutional convention, when state leaders finally took their grievances seriously and tried to rectify them. Smaller areas also resorted to such threats. Lunenburg County, in Southside Virginia, threatened to break off from the state in 1861 if Virginia did not join the Confederacy. However, West Virginia was the first to successfully turn the threat into reality, and its success set a precedence. Following its lead, Unionists in Floyd County tried to organize their own state when they took control of the county late in the war. They even went so far as to elect their own governor. Other loyal areas in Appalachia, encouraged by West Virginia's success, also tried to declare their independence from the Confederacy and from their state, most notably in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. No other attempt permanently succeeded, though, because none had the military backing of the Union that West Virginia enjoyed.[10]

The area of northwestern Virginia that the Union controlled militarily was economically

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[9] Joseph Eggleston Segar, *Letter to a Friend in Virginia, in Vindication of His Course in Declining to Follow His State into Secession* (Washington, D.C.: William H. Moore, Printer, 1862), 5, quoted in Wakelyn, "Politics of Violence," 71; Joseph Alliene Brown, *The Memoirs of a Confederate Solider* (Abingdon, VA: The Forum Press, 1940), 6, quoted in McKinney, *Fayette County,* 186.

[10] Reynolds, "A Pragmatic Loyalty," 64; Sean Michael O'Brien, *Mountain Partisans: Guerrilla Warfare in the Southern Appalachians, 1861-1865* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 176; Rice, *West Virginia*, 132.

tied to the free states surrounding it, while southwestern Virginia's economy was connected to

the rest of Virginia. However, no clear boundary marked where that shift occurred. Charleston is

the traditional dividing point, but that has its limitations. Charleston itself had a large secessionist

population, and in September 1862, a pro-Confederate newspaper named *The Guerrilla* began

publication there. Additionally, many counties north of Charleston retained large areas of

secessionist sentiment. Hardy, Harrison, Lewis, Gilmer, Calhoun, Braxton, and Roane Counties

all had large populations of secessionists through the end of the war. In Wood County, as well,

most of the rural areas remained loyal to Virginia and offered a secure living spot with close

access to the B&O for armed guerrilla groups. Many of the southern counties of West Virginia

remained staunchly sympathetic to the Confederacy's stance on states' rights until the end of the

war, even though the area remained under Federal control. Conversely, in southwestern Virginia,

enthusiasm for secession and support for the Confederacy, once so strong in most of the area,

waned as the Union conducted destructive raids between 1863-1865 into the area, tearing it apart

with internal tensions.[11]

Since no clear dividing line between sympathies existed, several proposals were made

during the debates over West Virginia statehood as to where the state's boundary lines would lie.

A proposal in December 1862 recommended as many as 71 counties be a part of the new state,

but 45 of those were loyal to the Confederacy and lay outside of Union control. After ten days of

debate over the issue, a settlement was reached. Forty-five counties were included

unconditionally in the new state, and six more northeastern ones would be added if voters there

ratified the constitution. Five of those six did end up ratifying the constitution, but under

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[11] Sutherland, *Savage Conflict*, 161; Fisher, "Feelin' Mighty Southern," 341; McKinney, *Fayette County*, 13; James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 303; Matheny, *Wood County*, 43-44; Drake, *A History of Appalachia*, 100; Addison Brown Roler Diary, July 5 1861, Addison Brown Roler Papers, VHS.

questionable circumstances. In Hardy County the affirmative vote was 76-0, whereas Pendleton County reported a final tally of 181-0. The vote in Hampshire was 75-9, in Morgan 362-0, in Berkeley 665-2, and in Jefferson 238-3. Three months later a proposal was made to include fourteen additional counties, but it was quickly discarded. Those counties would have complicated the legality of slavery in the new state, and their inclusion would have likely caused the statehood bill to fail. The final boundaries the statehood bill proposed were geographically rather than politically based, and many counties, especially in the southern portion of the state still under Confederate control, never had the chance to hold a vote on the measure. After Abraham Lincoln signed the statehood bill in December 1862 and it took effect in June 1863, southwestern Virginia, an area previously united by political and economic measures, was permanently split by a new state line.[12]

As the division within western Virginia clearly demonstrates, the stereotype of a Union Appalachia during the Civil War is decidedly a myth. While many Unionists did live in Confederate-controlled areas, the idea of a solid Union bloc through the heart of the Confederacy is the result of popular journalists and novelists who paid increasing attention to Unionism in that area in the decades following the war until it eventually became the dominant theme there. Reality stands in stark contrast to the myth, as evidenced by the Union leaders who attempted to use the mountain regions as bases for their military operations throughout the war but found both politically and logistically the mountain people proved less hospitable and cooperative than they expected. As the war progressed, many mountaineers grew resentful at any outside interventions —northern or southern. This sentiment that lent to the ferocity of the guerrilla warfare in the

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[12] Curry, *A House Divided*, 87-89, 100-103.

area.[13]

 To bring further chaos to the area, political affiliations often fell across a wide spectrum, and were not confined into neat categories of Unionists or secessionists. Some in western Virginia who wished to remain loyal to the Union sought division from Virginia, but other Unionists desired to keep the state unified. Conversely, most who supported the Confederate cause remained loyal to Virginia, but others saw the opportunity to apply the ideology of secession to state politics and secure independence for a portion of Virginia that had been politically stifled by powerful eastern landowners. In areas where sentiments were strongly and publicly divided, local inhabitants became subject to arrest when the opposing army took control. As armies passed through, they released civilians who were sympathetic to their cause and imprisoned any suspected of siding with the enemy. The course was reversed as soon as the other army moved through the area, however, which contributed to the instability in several areas of western Virginia.[14]

 The end of the war brought some stability back to the region, and some areas saw guerrilla warfare quickly dissipate. In other areas, however, it lingered on for decades. Veterans from the established armies returned to much different homes than the ones they had left. For those who had fought for the Confederacy, many came to the realization they had "lost all except honor" and the clothes on their backs. When local elections occurred in West Virginia in September 1865, any who refused to take the Oath of Allegiance were denied the opportunity to participate. In a letter to her northern relatives, Nancy Hunt, who lived in the Kanawha Valley, wrote, "The secesh looked badly because they could not vote." She explained that some

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[13] Reynolds, "A Pragmatic Loyalty," 7; Kenneth W. Noe, "Toward the Myth of Unionist Appalachia, 1865-1883," *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 6 (1994): 79; Fisher, "Feelin' Mighty Southern," 334.
[14] McKinney, *Fayette County,* 26.

Confederate veterans had had the audacity to show up in their gray uniforms, but if they were

seeking to make mischief, they had not succeeded. Many civilians and veterans who had

remained loyal to the Union were as destitute as former secessionists, however, and nearly a

decade after the war ended, a West Virginia Senator petitioned the Federal Government to repay

Unionists for any destruction the Union army had caused in West Virginia. To properly reimburse

only those who had remained loyal, he estimated the state needed over $20 million.[15]

As news of the armies' surrenders spread throughout western Virginia, many residents

reacted with disbelief that they might once again experience peace. One Fayette County resident

wrote to her friend on April 23, 1865, "Can it be true that there will be no more fighting? Shall I

see no more armies pass here? Nary another Reb? No more fear of guerrillas? This is too much

to take in all at once! I hope it is all true." By the end of May, one Kanawha Valley resident

wrote optimistically, "You can do business here as safely now as ever. The Rebels,

bushwhackers, and guerrillas have all been disbanded, been parolled and gone home." Guerrillas

who had fought to assist military strategy had disbanded, and many who had participated in

guerrilla warfare for self-preservation were soon able to return to their homes in safety. Another

West Virginia resident expressed surprise at how quickly she noticed the absence of those

guerrillas, writing, "All in peace and quiet here much more than I expected it to be in so short a

time." While rumors swirled that successful partisans such as McNeill and Mosby would

continue to fight for the Confederate cause after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, those rumors

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[15] Joseph Simmons Gilliam, "Recollections," Joseph Simmons Gilliam Letter, VHS: 1; William Selwyn Ball Reminiscence, VHS: 60; Nancy Hunt Letter, August 20, 1865, Charles Austin Goddard Papers, VHS; Hon. Henry G. Davis, *Speech of Hon. Henry G. Davis, of West Virginia, In Senate of the United States, Wednesday, May 13, 1874, on War Claims of West Virginia and its Citizens Against the United States* (Washington: John H. Cunningham, 1874), 14.

had no truth to them.[16]

The restoration of civilian law during peacetime did bring more security to the region, but some who had fought for personal advancement did not find it necessary to give up guerrilla warfare. In October 1863, the *Louisville Daily Journal* ran an editorial that noted, "The truth is, there have been bushwhackers from Virginia to Kansas ever since the war began, and we shall have them long after the war shall have ended." That prediction turned out to be true in western Virginia. With the region so evenly divided, the conflict had truly been brother fighting brother or neighbor against neighbor, and the desire for revenge did not dissipate with the organized armies. Many family feuds began during the war, spurred on by political fidelity, and the animosities over the vandalism and retaliation that were a part of guerrilla warfare took years to be laid to rest. Because so many bushwhackers had operated in areas where they were known, they and their descendants were feared and hated in the family lore of their opponents.[17]

As the nation turned toward reunification, Union troops remained busy in western Virginia tracking down bushwhackers and marauders who cared little for political causes and continued to attack their neighbors. In August 1865, the *Boston Herald* reported that a small detachment of soldiers had encountered a band of bushwhackers in western Virginia and had been unable to overcome them. This forced the military commander in western Virginia to have to dispatch a much larger number of troops to dispose of the bushwhackers and restore peace to the area. The County Clerk of Scott County, Virginia, recorded on October 11, 1865 that "the person and property of law-abiding citizens of this county bordering on Tennessee are in great danger of being depredated on by marauding bands of thieves, robbers, and marauders (called

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[16] McKinney, *Fayette County*, 192; Nancy Hunt Letters, May 26, 1865, July 23, 1865, Charles Austin Goddard Papers, VHS; William Selwyn Ball Reminiscence, VHS: 58.

[17] *Louisville Daily Journal*, October 12, 1863, 2; Weaver, *Civil War in Buchanan and Wise Counties*, 63; Rice, *West Virginia*, 135-136, Mann, "Family Group," 383.

bushwhackers) that still remain organizes along and near the Tennessee line for carrying out their felonious purposes, aforesaid, whenever they find the citizens in a defenseless and unprotected condition." For civilian protection, then, the court appointed special police forces to preserve order and arrest any people who entered the county seeking to harm its residents.[18]

How much impact guerrilla warfare in western Virginia had on the Civil War as a whole was minimal, as it offered the Confederacy few political or military advantages and remained a stalemate throughout the war. It did force the Union to keep a large number of occupying troops in the area, and at times it delayed Union military advances for weeks or months. Any gains the Federal army made in the area were offset by the endless need to conquer, occupy, and pacify the secessionists in the region. However, the Union never lost control of major communication lines, and the enduring presence of Union troops allowed token elections in the northwestern counties to assure the survival and success of the statehood movement. Additionally, the Confederacy was hurt by some of their own irregular bands, as residents in Confederate-held areas who never saw any Union invaders often complained about theft from those who fought under the Confederate cause in name yet cared little about it. These gangs, who were involved in the war for their own interests, forced residents to make meals for them while they helped themselves to any supplies or materials they found. The only thing they accomplished was making protracted enemies of their own neighbors and undermining the Confederate cause in areas loyal to the South by claiming to fight with its sanction.[19]

Although it made little significant impact beyond its own boundaries, guerrilla warfare in western Virginia did help to permanently divide the region with the establishment of West Virginia. It also impacted the new state in the decades following its founding, as Richard Curry

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[18] *Boston Herald*, August 29, 1865, 4; Addington, *History of Scott County*, 153.
[19] Freehling, *South Vs. South*, 4; Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 433; Mann, "Family Group," 380.

and Gerald Ham found in their study of the bushwhackers' war in western Virginia. They concluded, "There is no doubt, however, that guerrilla warfare intensified the spirit of lawlessness, intolerance, and partisan vindictiveness that characterized the Reconstruction era in West Virginia." While the war was officially over, the mountaineer mindset that had allowed guerrilla warfare to grow so prevalent in western Virginia from 1861-1865 lingered, filling a supposed time of peace with violence.[20]

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[20] Curry and Ham, "Bushwhackers' War," 433.

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Nathaniel McClure Menefee Letter

NARA National Archives and Records Administration I, Washington, D.C.
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        12/1864
Record Group 153, Wilson, Chris C. Private, Putnam Rangers, 03/1865
Record Group 393, Letters Received, 1861-1863; District of Kanawha, Army of Occupation of
        West Virginia

UVA   Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.
Isaac Shelby Letters
Micajah Woods Papers

VHS   Virginia Historical Society, Special Collections, Richmond, Virginia.
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