"Young bloods of the South:" The Confederate use and efficacy of irregular warfare in the American Civil War

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“Young Bloods of the South:”
The Confederate Use and Efficacy of Irregular Warfare in the American Civil War

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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To my parents, who always encouraged my interests, and to my wife Ali, for her patience, love, and support.
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Abstract

During the American Civil War, a number of southern irregulars operated behind Union lines. Though often neglected by historians, many of these irregulars proved effective. This study evaluates the different types of irregular combatant found in the South, including guerrillas, partisan rangers, and cavalry raiders, who varied in their identity, legality, and operations. The effectiveness of these fighters is analyzed in terms of their propaganda value, their ability to divert enemy troops, and the defeat of offensives by attacking supply lines.

Though the Union attempted to counter these irregular forces, the greatest impediment towards the Confederate irregular war effort was the decisions of the Confederate government itself. The West Point-trained leaders of the South were afraid of losing control of the independent irregulars. As a result, they never implemented policies that would systematically encourage a greater irregular war effort. In doing so, the South neglected to fully pursue a strategy that had great potential to alter the course of the war.
Introduction

It was not inevitable that the Union would win the Civil War. Throughout the struggle, individuals on both sides made decisions that ultimately resulted in Federal victory. One such decision was the Confederate high command’s choice to pursue a large scale conventional war against the North, and relegate irregular forces to a secondary role in terms of strategy and resources. By doing so, the Confederacy played to the Union’s strengths as an industrial, rich, and populous state. Had the South followed a different strategy, the outcome of the war might have been different.

Until recently, there was little examination of irregular warfare in the Civil War. In the last twenty years or so however, there has been a burgeoning historiography on the subject, though many academics still refuse to appreciate its import. Often, those scholars who do acknowledge its presence generalize irregular warfare in the Civil War as “guerrilla warfare,” that is, a civilian insurrection against an occupying force. These historians often consider the issue from a twentieth-century revolutionary perspective, claiming that the Confederacy should have pursued a “people’s war” along the vein of Mao tse Tung, Che Guevara, or similar revolutionaries.

This opinion was first proposed by Robert Kerby in his article “Why the Confederacy Lost.” Such a war, Kerby and his followers argue, would have negated the Union’s conventional strength by forcing them to occupy the entire expanse of the South, all the while trying to protect their supply lines and end southern resistance. Eventually, Kerby believes, the Union would have given up rather than continue to pursue an expensive war with no clear target or visible end. The theory of abandoning conventional conflict in favor of a large-scale, widespread guerrilla war was also advocated by Richard
Beringer and his colleagues in the venerable *Why the South Lost the Civil War*. Beringer says the South lacked the will and nationalism to pursue this course.

Other historians echo Beringer’s sentiment that the South was unable or unwilling to pursue this kind of war, even if they disagree with him that it could have achieved victory. Thus Gary Gallagher argues that nineteenth-century southern society would not agree to this strategy. Guerrilla warfare was repugnant to many citizens and soldiers on both sides, because it was seen as uncivilized and unworthy of brave men. Such a strategy would therefore never achieve the necessary support. In addition, Gallagher says that an irregular uprising would be severely hindered by the necessity to control the slave population, as well as receive the foreign aid he believes was an important precondition to any guerrilla victory. He also contends that southern nationalism was manifested in the Confederate armies and sustained by their victories. Guerrilla warfare could not encourage the same level of support. Stephan Ash in *When the Yankees Came* further states that as southern social and communal bonds broke down under the changes wrought by Federal occupation, so too did the will of the southern population to continue the struggle.

All these authors assume there was only one type of irregular combatant available. One of the few historians to identify categories of irregular combatant is Robert Mackey in his important monograph *The Uncivil War: Irregular Warfare in the Upper South*. Mackey says that there were multiple types of irregular resistance pursued by Confederate forces as a matter of policy and that each were defeated in turn by Union adaptability and counter-measures. While this historian’s premises appear persuasive, his conclusions fail to take several factors into account. Mackey does not consider the
psychological dimension of irregular warfare, nor does he speculate about the widespread adaptation of irregular warfare. Whereas other scholars are too broad in their treatment of this topic, Mackey proves too narrow in his application.

There were in fact a variety of irregular forces that operated both within and outside the Confederacy. As irregulars, these fighters shared common attributes: their operations were conducted independently of the main field armies and often behind enemy lines. Their tactics relied upon surprise, mobility, and the active support of the citizenry, while their operations were directed towards the enemy’s weak points, especially their logistical and communications lines. Irregular forays were ideal for a weaker power unable to match a stronger power’s conventional strength, because the defending (conventional) force was required to adequately protect all potential targets in their rear. The irregulars, because of the necessarily low force-to-space ratio this dispersion entailed, and because of the ambiguity of their destination and location, could concentrate against weak enemy forces and obtain local superiority, despite the enemy’s overall superiority in numbers. ¹ Accordingly, enemy pickets, couriers, foraging details, patrols and small garrisons, railroads, telegraph lines, supply depots, wagons and bridges were all attacked.

The destruction of logistical targets hindered the ability of the foe to conduct conventional operations because of the difficulty in supplying their armies. As Antoine Henri Jomini (the most widely-read military theoretician of the time at West Point) noted;

In national wars where the inhabitants fly and destroy every thing in their path, …it is impossible to advance unless attended by trains of provisions

and without having a sure base of supply near the front of operations. Under these circumstances a war of invasion becomes very difficult, if not impossible.\textsuperscript{2} Jomini later observed that a general insurrection was not necessary to achieve such results, saying of irregular cavalry: “It can carry off his convoys, it can encircle his army, make his communications very perilous, and destroy the ensemble of his operations. In a word, it produces nearly the same results as a rising \textit{en masse} of a population.”\textsuperscript{3} During the war, several offensives were foiled in this manner. Pursuing this logistical strategy, irregular warfare, rather than seeking to defeat the principal field armies of the enemy in pitched battle, or capture and hold the enemy’s territory, focused on destroying the means by which these enemies sustained themselves.

Towards these strategic ends, irregular missions were shaped in part by the technological circumstances of their age. Much has been written on the importance of railroads during the American Civil War. Their principal importance was the hitherto unknown speeds at which they could transport men and material. Whereas a regiment of infantry marching through suitable terrain might travel at three miles an hour, by 1860, trains on well-maintained tracks could travel at speeds up to forty miles an hour.\textsuperscript{4} At the outbreak of war, the North possessed 21,000 miles of railroad in comparison to 9,000 for the South. Both governments commandeered the use of these civilian rail lines as needed during the war.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{3} Antoine Henri Jomini, \textit{The Art of War}, 313-14.
\textsuperscript{5} Jack Coggins, \textit{Arms and Equipment of the Civil War}, 112.
While railroads allowed strategic concentrations to be performed faster than ever before, they also dictated to a large degree where armies would be moved and what their objectives would be. As the principal source of supplies and reinforcements, commanders “tended to cling to lines of advance following a railway line, rather than seeking bold areas of manoeuvre [sic.].”6 At its peak, the United States Construction Corps, responsible only for the 2,000 miles of the Military Railroads, numbered 24,000 men, and were paid two dollars a day plus overtime, in comparison to the thirteen dollars a month the average soldier earned for most of the war.7 Such dedication shows the reliance placed on railroads, and the potential disruption their interdiction could have on the success or failure of an advance. Their very nature as a long and continuous static line made railroads especially difficult to defend along all points of its length. Accordingly, Union commanders invested considerable resources and ingenuity into their protection and maintenance.

In addition to their potential direct strategic impact, irregular actions against both logistical and combat objectives inflicted material and psychological reverses against the enemy that would over time erode his capability and willingness to continue the war. This effect was not only physical, measured by cost in material and casualties the irregulars inflicted, but also mental. Both civilians and soldiers of the opposing side would be discouraged by the lightning strikes and elusiveness of their foes, of the hostility of the population that assisted them, and of the inability to effectively control territory already “captured.” In the American Civil War, this frustration was displayed by the growth of a “hard war” policy that targeted Confederate sympathizers, by the

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7 Jack Coggins, *Arms and Equipment of the Civil War*, 112.
harshness with which Union authorities dealt with captured irregulars, and by the considerable attention the newspapers devoted to the exploits of irregulars who harassed and embarrassed Union soldiers and commanders. These propaganda coups also had the effect of bolstering Confederate morale and support throughout the Confederacy, including its occupied territories.

The first purpose discussed above, a logistical strategy of interdicting the supply and communications lines of the enemy, was purely military and meant to affect the conventional forces and actions of their opponents, by thwarting an enemy advance or diverting troops. The second, though, incorporated political and social realities and goals by factoring in the potential impact irregular activities had on the endurance of the foe. This second purpose was thus less concerned with the state of the conventional war than it was with wearing down the political will of the enemy to continue the fight. To achieve these results, the immediate and strictly military consequence of the foray did not matter. Instead, eventual victory would be obtained through the cumulative mental and physical results of many minor tactical victories. Utilizing their advantages of surprise, mobility, and local support, all irregulars had to do was continue to fight.

The third principle of irregular warfare was the diversion of troops. Often a result of successful logistical or corrosive operations, partisan warfare could cause great numbers of soldiers to be tied up defending rear instillations. By forcing the Union to disperse its soldiers over a wide area to defend against possible irregular attacks, Confederate irregulars could help negate the inherent numerical superiority the populous North possessed, thus giving southern conventional armies greater parity with their rivals.

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Despite these commonalities in method and intent, there were important distinctions among irregular combatants. These irregulars can be divided into three groups; cavalry raiders, partisan rangers, and guerrillas. Guerrillas were civilian fighters waging a rebellion against occupying Federal forces. Rather than being professional soldiers of the Confederacy, these combatants were (at least initially) an extension of their community, rather than the central government. Guerrillas could achieve all aims of irregular warfare; diverting troops, retarding military advances, and eroding enemy combatant and civilian morale. It was at the latter, however, that guerrillas had more of an effect, deprived as they were of the central leadership necessary to coordinate the former. The pursuit of such a psychological victory over their occupiers encouraged the tactics of brutality and intimidation practiced by these fighters. Guerrillas did not wear uniforms, and, in a crucial distinction from other irregulars, considered civilian targets legitimate aims in their personal war. As such, murder and looting of both prisoners and non-combatants was a common occurrence in the guerrilla war. The increasingly indiscriminant violence these “bushwhackers” indulged in eventually undermined the insurrection by corroding their own resources and support. Such activity contributed to the view held broadly by both sides that these men were mere criminals, and should be treated as such.

Cavalry raiders were, in contrast, enlisted soldiers of the Confederate army, responsible to the chain of command, and coordinated their actions with other Confederate forces. As such, these men wore uniforms (thereby distinguishing themselves from the surrounding inhabitants) and only attacked military targets. When not on an irregular mission (a raid) behind enemy lines, cavalry raiders functioned as
regular cavalry, performing the normal functions of reconnaissance, screening, and pursuit. Cavalry raiders thus straddled the line between conventional and unconventional forces, and did not exist permanently in their irregular status, though units like John Hunt Morgan’s and Nathan Bedford Forrest’s troopers “specialized” in these operations, and preferred them to standard cavalry duties. They were thus the most conventional of all irregular categories, and also the largest in scale, with several hundred or even a few thousand troopers conducting a raid. Raiders were primarily employed by the Confederate high command to achieve the first-mentioned object of irregular warfare: a logistical strategy aimed at crippling Union armies by denying them supplies. The threat this posed also necessitated increased rear guard forces. Though not envisioned in any other role by Confederate officials, raiders also achieved the other principle of irregular warfare, that of erosion, by becoming folk heroes to southern citizens and bogymen to their Yankee adversaries, while consistently inflicting more damage in men and resources than they lost.

In the spectrum of irregular warfare, partisan rangers existed in between the more conventional raiders and the more irregular guerrillas. Like the raiders, rangers were uniformed (and legal) enlisted soldiers, subject to Confederate authorities. They followed the “rules of war” and primarily struck military targets. They also practiced military discipline and coordinated their actions for the benefit of other Confederate forces and objectives. Like the guerrillas however, rangers existed permanently in their irregular status behind enemy lines (in occupied territory), and operated in small groups of a few dozen. Rangers also stood astride the two strategic principles of irregular warfare. While they engaged in some operations for specific operational and strategic ends, and diverted
many soldiers, their primary impact was on morale, garnering significant propaganda victories through their highly visible and daring exploits, and by the Union’s embarrassing inability to destroy them. Like raiders, partisan leaders provided southerners with idols and good news throughout the war, buoying up determination even as the conventional war turned against the Confederacy.

To explore the experience and latent potential of each type of unconventional fighter, attention must be brought to the differing natures and weakness of guerrillas, partisans and cavalry raiders. This will be accomplished through case studies of their most effective practitioners, beginning in the first chapter with the most accepted and conventional of the irregulars; Nathan Bedford Forrest and John Hunt Morgan, the cavalry raiders. The next chapter will demonstrate the military and political effectiveness of the more irregular and less accepted partisan rangers, as demonstrated by John Singleton Mosby and John McNeill. Both of these subjects’ long war time experience was defined by their irregular operations. While other cavalrymen such as “Red” Jackson, Earl Van Dorn or Joseph Wheeler engaged in raids, only John Hunt Morgan rivaled Forrest in the number and effectiveness of his raids, as well as his preference for them. Dedicated partisan rangers were even rarer; only John McNeil’s rangers rivaled Mosby’s 43rd Virginia Battalion in activity and duration.

The final chapter will examine the guerrilla war in Missouri and Arkansas, emphasizing the dichotomy between the guerrillas and other irregulars, and how these distinctions led to the former’s ultimate failure. Although there were a few notable guerrillas such as William Quantrill and Bill Anderson, beyond a few famous actions and massacres, most guerrilla actions were by their nature anonymous and small in scale. In
order to trace the general trends and developments of guerrilla warfare and the Union response to them, it is more helpful to examine a geographical area where the war was defined by insurrection. The states of Missouri and Arkansas form ideal case studies to witness the power and shortcomings of guerrilla warfare.

This work as a whole also follows a rough geographical structure, as in each region of the Confederacy a different form of irregular warfare predominated; with guerrillas most active in the Trans-Mississippi, cavalry raiders in the western theatre of Tennessee and Kentucky, and partisan rangers in Virginia. As these regions contained the most frequent and visible examples of each irregular form, practitioners of each type operating outside of their respective areas will be given only minimal attention.

When viewed in hindsight, history can frequently be perceived as being deterministic. Because “B” followed “A,” it is assumed that “B” must have necessarily followed, that there was no other possible outcome. Many historians realize this rejection of human agency negates what makes the study of history so compelling; the consequences of decision making. By examining alternative decisions, one can better appreciate the consequences of the actual outcome, and why it occurred. The study of irregular warfare in the American Civil War remains understudied in relation to its realized military and political accomplishments and its greater potential to alter the course of the war. As such, it deserves to be studied.
Chapter One: Cavalry Raiders

Independent, insubordinate, and aggressive to the point of rashness, Nathan Bedford Forrest represented a form of warfare that terrified his Union foes and West Pointers on both sides of the conflict. Arguably more than any other personality in the war, Forrest made irregular warfare a visible reality in the minds of Yankee war-planners. Forrest and cavalry raiders like him blurred the lines between conventional and irregular, and what was for many, acceptable and unacceptable, modes of war. In contrast to the seemingly inept conduct of the regular Confederate armies in the West, cavalry raiders under their dashing commanders proved to be the southerners’ most effective defense in that theatre. Such was the consternation and destruction these men wrought that General William T. Sherman famously vowed in frustration that he would have Forrest pursued “to the death, if it cost 10,000 lives and breaks the treasury.”¹

Of all styles of irregular warfare practiced in the American Civil War, none was as widely used by the Confederate government as cavalry raiders. Reflecting their irregular status, raiders, unlike partisan rangers, were not organized under the auspices of special legislation, nor banned outright like guerrillas. As previously discussed, raiding parties were composed of regularly constituted cavalry troopers, and thus were only irregular when on a raid, otherwise functioning as conventional cavalry. Nevertheless, some cavalry units, such as the cavalry commands of Forrest and John Hunt Morgan, specialized in these irregular actions. This was codified when the Army of Tennessee’s

cavalry was reorganized in late 1862 into three brigades of “regular” cavalry and two “partisan” bodies under Morgan and Forrest.²

These officers, often at the behest of their commanding general, would lead their men against rear area targets in the hope of hindering Union advances through pursuit of the logistical strategy. Because of their greater numbers and access to artillery, raiders could often destroy targets too well defended for other irregulars. As Jomini noted, irregular cavalry could through their activities simulate the effects of a mass rising against the foe’s communications.³ Brigadier General Basil W. Duke, an officer of John Hunt Morgan’s command (and his brother in law), echoed this sentiment when he spoke of his leader: “The author of the far reaching ‘raid,’ so different from the mere cavalry dash, he accomplished with his handful of men results which would otherwise have required armies and the costly preparations of regular and extensive campaigns.”⁴ Due to their primary focus on the logistical strategy of irregular warfare, and as a subunit of the main army in the theater, cavalry raiders were more concerned with affecting the conventional operations of the war than other types of irregulars, and existed for the regular army’s benefit. This was their primary raison d’être.

Cavalry raiders also, however, proved useful in tying down large numbers of enemy troops in the defense of these areas. Equally important, though less considered by Confederate decision-makers, was the cavalry raider’s capability to erode the foe’s resources and provide a visible, if temporary, Confederate presence in places no longer

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occupied by southern armies. In keeping with their irregular status, cavalry raiders
derived much of their equipment from their adversaries.\textsuperscript{5} Perhaps because of their focus
on the rear echelon, cavalry raiders, though utilizing means long practiced in organized
war, suffered the same stigma of illegitimacy that their partisan brothers did, often being
labeled as criminal guerrillas by angry and embarrassed opponents.

The most famous raids by the most famous practitioners occurred in the states of
Kentucky and Tennessee. Geopolitically, these states were of vital importance to both
North and South. Apart from guarding the interior of the Confederacy, both regions
contained populations sharply divided between Rebel and Unionist sympathies. As such,
both Washington and Richmond felt political pressure to protect these citizens, while the
inhabitants themselves were often imbued with a passion to defend their homes against
perceived enemies. Due to their great mobility and the changing circumstances of war,
raiders under Morgan or Forrest did not limit themselves to the area immediately behind
the armies, but rather operated across wide swaths of both states over the course of the
war.

By early 1862, Kentucky was under nominal Federal control, though it remained
threatened by irregulars for the rest of the war. In Tennessee, conventional Confederate
forces had been driven out of pro-secession Western and Middle Tennessee by the end of
the same year, but retained Unionist East Tennessee until the end of 1863. The railways
in these areas were of crucial importance for continued conquest of the South. In
Kentucky, the Louisville & Nashville railroad supplied the Union armies attempting to

\textsuperscript{5} Robert Selph Henry, ed. \textit{As They Saw Forrest: Some Recollections and Comments of Contemporaries}
drive the Confederates out of Tennessee. In Tennessee there were also important railroads. The Mississippi Central Railroad and the Mobile & Ohio Railroad connected the state to Vicksburg, Mississippi, while Chattanooga, Tennessee served as a hub for railroads into Georgia. Securing these lines, as well as waterways like the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, was therefore an important component of the Union advance into the Deep South.

Like other irregulars, cavalry raiders usually operated in areas where they themselves had lived. They therefore benefitted from a personal knowledge of the ground and the people. One Union man said that “Forrest knew every inch of the ground and every ford and cross-road.” Because raiders did not function permanently behind enemy lines like guerrillas or partisans, active civilian support was less crucial to the success of their operations. Nevertheless, many times the raiders would return from an expedition with more men than they had left with, as locals swelled the ranks. Raiders thus gained recruits from areas that otherwise would have been unavailable to the Confederacy. While in the field, civilians frequently provided the Confederates with supplies, intelligence on enemy dispositions, and guides.

Just as the regular Confederate army and other irregular groups reflected a cross-section of southern society, so too did the cavalry raiders. Southern culture in general prized the horseback-riding skills necessary to conduct raids. One of Forrest’s privates, a college-educated Classics teacher from Tennessee, noted the abundance of skilled

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practitioners: “The South, in the war period, was essentially a country of horseback riders.”

Sherman confirmed this view, writing of raiders he referred to as “the young bloods of the South”: “War suits them and the rascals are brave, fine riders, bold to rashness, and dangerous subjects in every sense. . . . They are the most dangerous set of men that this war has turned loose upon the world. They are splendid riders, first-rate shots, and utterly reckless. Stewart, John Morgan, Forrest, and [Red] Jackson, are the types and leaders of this class. These men must all be killed or employed by us before we can hope for peace.”

Regardless of classification, the initiative for irregular warfare stemmed almost entirely from the practitioners themselves. Forrest was no exception to this rule, demonstrating his independence and ambition early in life. From humble origins as the son of a poor blacksmith, the future “king of cavalry,” had risen through the hierarchical ranks of southern society to become one of Memphis’s richest and most prominent citizens. That this occurred in spite of the unsavory, low-brow connotations slave-trading (his profession) carried in Antebellum society displays just how much Forrest’s character propelled him to success.

During the war, Forrest personally embodied the same disdain for convention that his tactics manifested. Joining as a private, Forrest ended the war as a lieutenant general, the only such meteoric rise in either army during the war. Brave and imposing, the Confederate officer participated in combat to a level unparalleled by others of his rank.

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8 Robert Selph Henry, ed. As They Saw Forrest: Some Recollections and Comments of Contemporaries, 222.
10 Jack Hurst, Nathan Bedford Forrest, 64-5.
During the war, the slave trader-turned-soldier killed thirty men in combat, one more than the number of horses shot from under him.¹¹ Like other irregulars, the cavalry chief had a low opinion of West Point regulars, believing their tactics to be unimaginative. He later boasted that “Whenever I met one of them fellers [sic] that fit by note, I generally whipped h-ll out of him before he got his tune pitched.”¹² This disdain extended to the regulars on his own side. Forrest had seen southern officers capitulate at Fort Donelson. Later, he witnessed General Braxton Bragg make similarly poor judgments. Such observations made the Tennessean more confident in his own judgment, even to the point of insubordination. John Morton, one of his officers confessed that “he cared little for army regulations and tactics.”¹³ When a superior gave orders he did not agree with, Forrest often ignored them.

Though more genteel and educated than his peer from Tennessee, John Hunt Morgan displayed a resourcefulness and tenacity reminiscent of Forrest in his Antebellum life. Like Forrest and many other irregulars, the middle-class Morgan was largely self-made, having found success in manufacturing. Similarly, the blue-grass native was no stranger to violence: he had been suspended from Transylvania College for dueling before fighting in the Mexican-American War.¹⁴

Personally genial and unassuming in contrast to the bellicose Forrest, Morgan was also personally brave and confident in his own judgment to the point of disobedience. It was this loss of control over irregulars that West Point educated Confederates found so

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disconcerting about their mode of war. The commonalities with Forrest, and for that matter other irregulars, was not coincidence but indications of traits necessary for effective independent service behind enemy lines, where resourcefulness and quick, decisive thinking were musts.

Despite their unorthodox methods, both raiders considered themselves real soldiers, not thieves or bushwhackers. Having spent over a year in the “regular” cavalry before making irregular names for themselves in 1862, both officers usually behaved like lawful combatants in the field. The institutional professionalism of raiders was displayed in their utter contempt for civilian bushwhackers. In February 1865, with guerrilla-brigands running rampant throughout the Deep and Trans-Mississippi South, Forrest informed a Union counter-part he was communicating with that “he was as anxious to rid the country of them [guerrillas] as was any officer in the U. S. Army, and that he would esteem it a favor if General Thomas would hang every one he caught.”\(^\text{15}\) In his 1862 “Proclamation to the People of Estelle and Adjoining Counties,” Morgan proved he shared the conventional disgust with guerrillas. Echoing Union General Henry Halleck’s statement in Missouri the same year, the Confederate officer declared “Private citizens who seek opportunity to ambush our soldiers commonly known as ‘Bushwhackers’ will be regarded as outlaws, and orders will be issued to shoot them wherever found.”\(^\text{16}\) Although Morgan’s statement was directed towards Unionists, clearly he, like his Union opposites, did not view civilian fighters as legal combatants.


Tactically, cavalry raiders were aggressive, relying on surprise like other irregulars. William Witherspoon, a lieutenant in Forrest’s cavalry, attributed the latter’s superiority over conventional foes to this aggression. Whereas West Pointers maintained a reserve, reflecting a preoccupation with preventing a rout, Forrest committed the maximum number of men to the battle, once even neglecting to designate horse-holders. “If we are whipped we’ll not need any horses,” he told a protesting subordinate. In keeping with this perceived superiority over wooden professionals, Morton declared that his methods “couldn’t be computed by any known rules of warfare.”

Rather than relying on the conventional mounted charge like regular cavalry were expected to employ early in the war, raiders usually fought on foot with infantry weapons, recognizing the realities of unsuitable terrain and improving firepower. British observer General Viscount Garnet Wolseley dubbed them “winged infantry,” while Basil Duke agreed that they were “not cavalry, but mounted riflemen.” Raiders were quick to exploit the psychological dimension of warfare, spreading fear and confusion through misinformation and bold maneuvering. On more than one occasion, Forrest was able to demand the surrender of a fortified place rather than storm it.

When raiders wished to avoid combat (a frequent desire, as their objectives were oriented towards logistical rather than manpower destruction, and speed was of the essence) they could retreat by a different route from whence they came, and thereby

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could usually outpace their ignorant and confused pursuers. This advantage was enlarged by the riders’ local topographical knowledge and superior mounts.

Contemporary observers realized this; one insightful journalist informed his readers that “cavalry is not compelled to fight a superior force, except it be of a similar kind, for it can readily escape infantry and heavy artillery, and if surrounded, can cut itself out.”

Morgan and Forrest began their irregular careers together in the summer of 1862. In May, the Confederate Army of Mississippi had been driven out of Corinth, Mississippi during the Siege of Corinth. By July of that year, Union General Don Carlos Buell was advancing toward Chattanooga with 40,000 men. Unable to match the Federals conventionally, Confederate General Pierre Gustave T. Beauregard ordered the raiders to disrupt the Yankee advance as best they could. The operation itself was left to the field commanders. Forrest directed his First Tennessee Raid against Murfreesboro, a hundred miles away from Buell’s target.

The 1,400 troopers left for their destination on July 9, reaching Murfreesboro by the 13th. The town was manned by a garrison consisting of two full regiments and parts of a third, as well as an artillery battery, a force of similar size to his own. Seizing the initiative, Forrest capitalized on the dispersed positions of the defenders to defeat them in detail. Sending a holding force to delay the more distant bluecoats, Forrest began his assault at dawn to maximize surprise. Driving the 9th Michigan from their camp on the

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outskirts of the city, the Rebel cavalry pursued the survivors to a nearby hill while other
cavalrymen carried the fighting into the town’s streets.²²

By 8 A.M., the Union infantry had established themselves in two defensive
positions half a mile apart. Knowing how costly attacking prepared works were, Forrest
used a combination of intimidation and theatrics to induce his opponents to surrender. To
the 9th Michigan’s Lieutenant Colonel John Parkhurst, Forrest sent the following
message; “COLONEL: I must demand an unconditional surrender of your force as
prisoners of war or I will have every man put to the sword. You are aware of the
overpowering force I have at my command, and this demand is made to prevent the
effusion of blood.”²³ To the commander of the 3rd Minnesota he sent a similar ultimatum
accompanied by a staged demonstration that convinced his enemy that he possessed a
force twice its actual size.²⁴ The northern officers surrendered. Forrest reported that for a
cost of less than a hundred men he had killed or wounded two hundred and:

- captured two brigadier-generals, staff and field officers, and 1,200 men;
- burnt $200,000 worth of stores; captured sufficient stores with those
  burned to amount to $500,000, and brigade of 60 wagons, 300 mules, 150
  or 200 horses, and field battery of four pieces; destroyed the railroad and
depot at Murfreesborough [sic]. Had to retreat to McMinnville, owing to
large number of prisoners to be guarded.²⁵

As successful as Forrest’s first raid was, it was rivaled by that of Morgan’s taking
place at the same time in Kentucky. The results of the First Kentucky Raid were
succinctly recorded in his report:

²² Report of Col. William Duffield, 9th Michigan Infantry, July 23, 1862. United States War Department, 
16, pt. 1, 809.
I left Knoxville on the 4th day of this month with about nine hundred men, and returned to Livingston on the 28th inst. with nearly twelve hundred, …during which time I traveled over a thousand miles, captured seventeen towns, destroyed all the Government supplies and arms in them, dispersed about fifteen hundred Home-guards and paroled nearly twelve hundred regular troops. I lost in killed, wounded and missing of the number that I carried into Kentucky, about ninety.26

The incursion caused considerable consternation among Unionists in the state, and caused millions of dollars of damage to Federal property.27 In addition, through the use of scouts, civilian assistance, and Federal telegraphs, Morgan was able to provide his superiors with crucial intelligence regarding Union troop movements and intentions.28

Morgan followed up his success with an even more decisive action a month later in August, the “Gallatin Raid.” The bluegrass troopers’ target was the Louisville and Nashville Railroad tunnel; a thousand-foot shaft that served as the primary artery for the Army of Ohio’s supplies. After capturing most of the 375-man garrison by surprise, Morgan loaded a locomotive with explosives and sent it through the tunnel, collapsing the structure. The resulting damage closed the passage for three months. Upon his retreat, Morgan heavily defeated a 700-strong body of cavalry sent to intercept him, inflicting fifty percent casualties on the attackers.29

Together, these raids put irresistible logistic pressure on Buell’s army. The Appalachian Highlands that lay between him and Chattanooga were not agriculturally capable of supplying his army, only the railroads could do that. Buell’s advance virtually

26 Duke, History of Morgan’s Cavalry, 205.
29 Mackey, The Uncivil War, 136, 137-38.
ceased, even though there was no sizable force of Confederates in Chattanooga.\textsuperscript{30}

“Instead of moving against the enemy,” one northern officer later admitted, “he had now
to bend all energies to his own security.”\textsuperscript{31} Coordinating their activities with each other
for the benefit of a third party (conventional Confederate forces and the defense of the
city), the cavalry raiders displayed a capacity to cooperate with other groups to achieve
their objectives; something that guerrillas rarely did. Two parties totaling less than 3,000
men had stopped an invasion of 40,000. Furthermore, the successful raids paved the way
for Bragg’s invasion of Kentucky, in part encouraged by the popular support Morgan had
received.

Having achieved the irregular goal of logistical destruction, the raiders
compounded their success by fulfilling the other aims of irregular warfare, that of troop
diversion and erosion of resources. Protecting three hundred miles of railroad track was
not easy for the Union commander. Guards were posted on every train and fortifications
built at important points. In all, Buell devoted two entire divisions to protecting his
communications, greatly weakening his front-line strength in the process.\textsuperscript{32}

Aside from the lopsided ratio of material damage to enemy garrisons and supplies
compared to Confederate casualties, raiders inflicted less tangible but equally serious
psychological and political damage, a component of the erosion principle. The northern
press reacted in panic. Multiplying the size of Forrest’s force to as much as 6,000,
journalists speculated that the Confederates would retake Nashville. The \textit{Philadelphia

\textsuperscript{30} Earl Hess, \textit{The Civil War in the West: Victory and Defeat from the Appalachians to the Mississippi}
\textsuperscript{31} Lt. Col. Henry Stone, “The Operations of General Buell in Kentucky and Tennessee in 1862.” \textit{Papers of
the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts}, vol. 7, 264.
\textsuperscript{32} Earl Hess, \textit{The Civil War in the West}, 93; Archer Jones, “Military Means, political Ends: Strategy,” in
Inquirer pessimistically wrote that in that city the soldiers would “give the best fight possible, and if compelled to yield, will shell the city.” Some Yankee officers took desperate action to prevent a popular uprising in support of the irregular raiders. The Alexandria Gazette reported that when Brigadier General J. T. Boyle, Union commander of Louisville, learned of Murfreesboro’s state he declared “It is ordered that every able-bodied man take arms and aid in repelling the marauders. Every man who does not join will remain in his house forty eight hours, and be shot down if he leaves it.” Union leadership also came under fire. “This disaster is a fitting commentary on the almost perfect inaction in which Gen. Halleck has kept his army since the retreat of Beauregard from Corinth,” accused one Maryland paper.

In the wake of these incursions, a few Yankee journalists grasped the inherent challenges of irregular warfare. One perceptive reporter observed:

The perfect familiarity of the marauders with the topography of the country, the impossibility of protecting the small detachments distributed on the road for guarding purposes against surprise and attack by overwhelming numbers soon convinced our commanders that the road could only be held by using the whole of the army in forming an unbroken cordon in front of it. Even the numerous tetee-dupont [sic], stockades, redoubts, fortified camps, &e., that had been constructed, were found to furnish protection to certain points only, while the intervening sections of the road remained at the mercy of the rebels.

The ability of raiders to concentrate their strength to achieve temporary local superiority over a dispersed foe was also noticed by the author of a Springfield Illinois Weekly Republican article. “To such a style of warfare,” he concluded, “we are inevitably

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34 Unknown, “Honorable John S. Phelps; Missouri; Military; Arkansas.” Alexandria Gazette, July 21, 1862.
exposed with so long a line and so many points to garrison, and we must expect some such casualties.” Forced to defend static positions, the Union left the initiative with the southerners, who could pick their targets at will and exploit the superior mobility of their mounted forces. Because of the wide range of their targets and movements, raiding allowed the weaker power to concentrate against the weakest points of what was otherwise a much stronger opponent. Therefore, they need only engage their foes when they possessed local superiority in strength. Such an approach allowed the Confederacy to keep the initiative in a theatre otherwise defined by Union offensives.

In contrast to the melancholy North, the southern press abounded with jubilance. “Morgan has left his trail of fire and blood,” read the Mobile Register’s front page triumphantly, “and has terrified not only the Unionists of Kentucky, but the whole abolitionists of the North and West. Forrest, in middle Tennessee, has accomplished the same results on a grander scale. . . . For all this these two distinguished men have received the applause and praise of their country.” Another paper likewise addressed the psychological erosion of the raids:

You have heard of Forrest capturing 1,200 Yankees and General Crittenden at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, also of Morgan’s exploits in Kentucky. Both of these gallant partisans destroyed quantities of stores and, what is better, reassured the drooping spirits of our friends in this quarter. The Yankee sympathizers in that region are stunned by this audacity. The great benefit of these raids is that it wears out our Yankee

39 Unknown, “Letter from Chattanooga: The Results of Forrest and Morgan’s Exploits.” Mobile Register, August 2, 1862.
friends with watchfulness and anxiety, as our guerrillas turn up everywhere.\textsuperscript{40}

Cavalry raiding was conceptualized by most Confederate planners as merely a subsidiary tactic to set the stage for conventional success. While it was an extremely potent weapon in the logistical strategy, it could in fact contribute to the war effort in other ways.

Influential as the First Tennessee and Kentucky Raids were, their success was duplicated by another pair of coordinated strikes later in the year. By December of 1862, General Ulysses S. Grant, in conjunction with a water-borne army headed by William T. Sherman, was threatening Vicksburg, Mississippi with capture. Acting on the suggestion of one of his cavalry commanders, Lt. General John C. Pemberton, in charge of the Confederate defense, dispatched Earl Van Dorn on December 17 with 3,500 men to destroy the Federal depot at Holly Springs, Mississippi. The result was one of the largest cavalry raids of the war.

To further disrupt and distract Grant, Forrest was loosed by Bragg six days earlier on West Tennessee with 2,100 men to cut the Mississippi Central Railroad and the Mobile & Ohio Railroad. Grant drew all his supplies from these lines, while his accumulated stores were stockpiled at Holly Springs. Their twin destruction would make his advance impossible, as frequent campaigning by both combatants had already stripped the region of foodstuffs.\textsuperscript{41} That the safety of his supplies was precarious the general knew. On December 15, the day Forrest entered West Tennessee on his second

\textsuperscript{40} Unknown, “Intercepted Letters: the Following are a Batch of Intercepted Letters.” \textit{The Daily Delta}, August 21, 1862.

raid, Grant confided his anxiety to his sister: “I am extended now like a Peninsula into an enemies country with a large Army depending for their daily bread upon keeping open a line of rail-road running one hundred & ninety miles through an enemy’s country, or at least through territory occupied by a people terribly embittered and hostile to us.”

Forrest confirmed these fears. On December 16, the day after he crossed the Tennessee River, Forrest dispersed a Federal force of several hundred cavalry at Lexington before dividing his command to maximize confusion and destruction. Despite many new recruits, Forrest’s command took hundreds of Union prisoners over the next week and a half, and all the supply depots, railroads, and bridges within reach were destroyed.

Extracting his scattered command from the now alert Federals would be complicated by a pursuing force under General Jeremiah Sullivan that outnumbered the Tennessean’s own force. Believing his force too tired to outrun the pursuers, Forrest instead confronted the enemy at Parker’s Crossroads on December 31. Attacking an infantry detachment numbering around 1,600 men, Forrest assailed the bluecoats throughout the morning, hammering their front before successfully turning their flank and threatening their rear. “We drove them through the woods with great slaughter and several white flags were raised in various portions of the woods and the killed and wounded were strewn over the ground. Thirty minutes more would have given us the day.” he told his superiors.

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Forrest’s victory was undone though by the negligence of the men he had ordered to guard a nearby approach. Unbeknownst to the Rebel raiders, Yankee reinforcements had arrived and promptly assaulted their rear. The southern cavalrmy men adapted quickly, attacking in both directions before retreating rapidly. Forrest sustained a hundred casualties and 250 troopers captured in exchange for 237 Union dead. Though it was an undignified ending to an otherwise successful foray, the battle of Parker’s Crossroads demonstrated that raiders could function under less than ideal circumstances. Forrest’s performance in the battle allowed his command to escape and raid again. As a whole, the expedition had been a great success. Besides completing their logistical objective, the Confederate interlopers in Tennessee had captured 1,500 soldiers, wounded or killed hundreds more, and replaced their obsolete shotguns and squirrel rifles with captured modern military small arms.

The Rebel activity in Tennessee was compounded by Van Dorn’s raid in northern Mississippi. While Federal attention was focused to the north, Van Dorn successfully attacked the supply depot at Holly Springs on December 19. The surprised garrison of 1,500 surrendered, rendering up vast warehouses of supplies, machine shops, and a newly built hospital to destruction. The Confederate commander estimated the damage at $1.5 million. This figure, by no means implausible or unmatched by other raids, is all the more remarkable when it is considered that in 1862, such a figure would pay the annual salaries of more than 9,600 Union soldiers. More importantly, Van Dorn

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and Forrest had thwarted Grant’s campaign to Vicksburg. “Raided made upon the railroad,” Grant reported, “have cut me off from supplies, so that farther advance by this route is perfectly impracticable.” Grant was forced to withdraw back to Memphis, Tennessee. This in turn allowed Pemberton the opportunity to reinforce Vicksburg’s garrison with his field army that had been facing Grant. Sherman’s smaller force, insufficient for the enlarged task, soon followed his commander back north. Once again, raiders had succeeded in stopping the Yankees where conventional armies had failed.

This much had now been recognized by the citizens of the South. Catherine Edmondston of North Carolina reflected this truth as well as the buoying affects of the raids when she wrote in her diary that “At the West we have had a series of successes, small in themselves…but all tending to animate and cheer the spirits of our soldiers depressed by the retreat from Kentucky. . . .Forrest and his men have not been idle.” Some perceived the cavalry raiders, not armies, as their country’s principle defense. Augusta’s Daily Constitutionalist printed the telling declaration that “should the enemy succeed in penetrating still farther into the heart of the country, we hope our cavalry will succeed in making his position untenable for want of supplies.” The same article further espoused the strengths of a logistical raiding strategy:

The more recent exploits of Morgan, Van Dorn, Forrest, Wheeler, and Wharton, have made manifest the great power of our cavalry, and pointed out the proper object for its attacks. . . .The cavalry’s business is not to

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destroy a large army by direct action, but to cripple it and render it inefficient…By destroying the enemy’s stores, burning his trains, capturing his guards, cutting his communications…the Confederate cavalry is now rendering the most important aid to the country and the cause.”

While the front pages of southern papers continued to build up these irregulars as heroes for a hopeful populace, Union supporters suffered an inverse, erosive affect on their morale. Sherman gloomily reported that his retreat had been met in the North with accusations of “repulse, failure, and bungling.” The *New York Daily Tribune* devoted part of its front page to describing how Forrest had with “6,000 cavalry and eight guns” (four times their actual number) destroyed vast stores despite Grant’s warning “to all commanders on the Mobile and Ohio railroad, so that nobody was surprised, and ample time was had to defend the road.” To this hint of incompetence, Philadelphia’s *Public Ledger* added to its front page account that “When it is understood that General Grant’s vast army is depending on this road for supplies of every description, it will be seen that somebody is lacking in something.” An Illinois soldier confirmed this fear and evidenced his dissatisfaction in the wake of Forrest’s latest strike in his journal:

The destruction of the railroad has cut off our supplies, and there is no telling just exactly how long it may be before it is fixed and in running order again, so they have been compelled, I suppose, to cut down our rations. . . . I just wish that Forrest, who is the cause of about all this trouble, had to go without anything to eat. . . . Maybe after he had been hungry real good for a while he’d know how it felt himself, and would leave our railroads alone.

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54 Unknown, “From Cairo and Below, A Clear Account at Last of Affairs at Holly Springs Cairo, December 29, 1862,” *Public Ledger*, December 29, 1862.
1862 has in hindsight been seen as the high point of Confederate raiding effectiveness. Union officials, often unable or unwilling to distinguish between cavalry raiders and other irregulars, responded initially with a mixture of legalistic or moral rhetoric and increased passive defenses via fortification and larger garrisons. Often belittled as a mere “horse thief,” some northerners accused Morgan of much more heinous crimes. One *New York Times* journalist accused Morgan after his Ohio raid in 1863 of committing “all sorts of crimes…robbing rich and poor…stealing horses and murdering innocent and defenseless men, women, and children.” When Morgan was captured during this “Great Raid,” he and his men were not sent to a POW camp like their comrades in the infantry and regular cavalry. Instead, upon the urging of Union General-in-Chief Henry Halleck, they were delivered to the Ohio State Penitentiary like common criminals and denied parole. The officers owed their later freedom to a daring escape rather than a prisoner exchange.

In fact, as already shown, Morgan was a commissioned officer in the Confederate Army that, although operating independently of the main army, cooperated with, and received orders from, military superiors. Rather than targeting civilians, Morgan actively tried to protect them. One of his men, writing to his sister, noted that “Morgan always notifies the trains on the road after he has burned the bridges, which shows he is something of a man after all -- nay, an honorable man; for if a train should go down

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through these trestle-works, not a soul would be left to tell the tale.”

Rather than encourage looting, Morgan issued stern orders to his men against stealing and abusing civilians, calling such perpetrators “cowardly miscreants.”

Morgan’s persecution for his legitimate methods of war did not end with his imprisonment. On September 4, 1864, while conducting his last raid, Morgan was caught unawares as a Union advance guard entered the town where he slept. Running from his bedroom, Morgan found himself identified, cut off, and discovered. Though the southerner attempted to surrender, one blue trooper recognized the “horse thief” and shot him dead. Thus ended the irregular career of John Hunt Morgan, a commissioned officer in the Confederate Army.

The connection of raiding with guerrilla warfare and banditry led many Union officials to retaliate against local civilians as well, encouraging the prosecution of a “hard war” policy. One such instance occurred after the afore mentioned Gallatin raid of 1862, when angry Yankee soldiers arbitrarily arrested sixty males of the town, including boys and old men, to be “taken to Nashville to be hanged as spies for aiding Morgan.”

Fortunately for the prisoners, upon learning of their predicament the raiders returned to the town and rescued them. Though this act of retribution was spontaneous, some believed it to be a matter of course when dealing with raiders.

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62 James Ramage, Rebel Raider, 116.
commission held to evaluate General Buell’s command decisions, Morgan’s raids were discussed. When asked why Buell did not conduct retaliatory strikes against the local population he thought were assisting “these parties of guerrillas,” Buell countered that he objected “to this term ‘guerillas’ as applied to these troops. They are as much troops as any in the rebel service. . . .I know of no reason for giving them a character which does not belong to them, for they are not ‘guerrillas’ in the proper sense of that term.”

Buell’s understanding of this distinction was rare among his peers.

Union commanders also tried to mitigate the logistical damage inflicted by the raids. The primary method was an increase in fortification and garrisons. Around these vulnerable sites, wooden blockhouses were constructed from eighteen inch-thick logs to render them impervious to small arms fire. Square or cross-shaped, the one to two story buildings would usually house only a few dozen men. They were nevertheless potentially formidable obstacles, surrounded as they were by a palisade, loop-holed for defense, and sometimes containing artillery. By late 1862, the Louisville and Nashville railroad and western district of Kentucky alone was manned by over 20,000 soldiers guarding communications and depots, excluding additional forces frequently dispatched to pursue specific raiders. Such practices merely strengthened the dispersion affect of cavalry raiding, while the low force-to-space ratio in the large western theatre meant that raiders could still find and strike weak spots.

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63 Special Commission, General Reports, December 25, 1862. United States War Department, The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, (ser. 1)
65 James Ramage, Rebel Raider, 145.
Some commanders attempted to limit their reliance on the railroads. In his memoirs, Grant claimed that the raids by Van Dorn and Forrest had revealed the grave limitations in maintaining long supply lines over enemy country, and encouraged his later decision to live off the land.\textsuperscript{66} In his immediate report however, Grant specifically denied this possibility, saying “The country does not afford supplies for troops, and but a limited supply of forage.”\textsuperscript{67} “Living off the land,” made so famous by Grant in his Second Vicksburg Campaign, General Samuel Curtis in Arkansas, and Sherman in Georgia and the Carolinas, was only possible when the necessarily dispersed armies were not threatened by large scale organized resistance, and when the country was sufficiently undamaged to sustain an army.

Major General William Rosecrans tried to thwart the raiders’ logistical strategy by stockpiling his supplies in advance of his assault against Bragg near Murfreesboro in late December 1862. In this he was successful. Though Morgan destroyed two vast trestles and closed the Louisville and Nashville railroad for five weeks, Rosecrans was not forced to retreat. The raid still, however, fulfilled the other two principles of irregular warfare. Rosecrans dispatched 7,300 men of all arms to chase the raiders (this in addition to the 20,000 already guarding the rear); men that would have been far better spent in the approaching battle.\textsuperscript{68} In addition, Morgan inflicted $2 million worth of damage, captured 1,800 men and killed many others; all the while losing less than a hundred.\textsuperscript{69} Besides, as the Holly Springs raid showed, depots could also be destroyed. Like living off the land, stockpiling was a temporary solution.

\textsuperscript{67} Grant to Headquarters, Department of the Tennessee, December 23, 1862. United States War Department, Official Records, Ser. 1, vol. 17, pt. 2, 463.
\textsuperscript{68} James Ramage, Rebel Raider, 145.
\textsuperscript{69} Patricia Faust, ed. Historical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War, 512.
As was the case with other irregulars, Union officials were most successful when tailoring their responses to the specific threat. The indirect and passive policies already discussed had not dampened the raiders’ success. Many realized that a fundamental problem was the weakness of Union cavalry in both quantity and quality compared to their southern cousins. Rosecrans tried vigorously to rectify this disparity. He acquired thousands of additional mounts, repeating rifles, and carbines to better arm his expanded cavalry wing; by July 1863, 12,000 Federal troopers faced a similar number of lesser equipped southern cavalry that had outnumbered them by fifty percent just two months before. His efforts paid dividends later that month, when the improved Union cavalry contributed to the destruction of Morgan’s cavalry during his “Great” Ohio Raid.

The purpose of Morgan’s incursion, like previous raids, was to retard a Union advance before it began by cutting off Federal supply lines. Although his orders restricted him to Kentucky, the cavalier had other ideas. Deciding that a Kentucky raid would be ignored, the cavalry chieftain chose to extend his raid to Indiana and Ohio, without his superior’s knowledge.

Facing an attack on their home territory, Union officials reacted with considerable vigor. Alert Union scouts had observed Morgan’s force crossing the Cumberland River in Kentucky, so the raider was followed from the start. Northern commanders were therefore unsurprised when Morgan unwisely crossed the Ohio River into Indiana on July 8, a few days into his raid. Having lost the advantage of surprise, the Confederates would now face organized resistance wherever they went. In addition to his pursuers, Governor

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Oliver P. Morton of Indiana quickly called for all able-bodied men to join the militia, and within days there were 65,000 Indiana men swarming the hills and garrisoning the towns in their assailants’ path. Although they were usually easily dispersed by the invaders, every skirmish (and now there was often several each day) cost Morgan more men, and crucially, more time.

Meanwhile, Major General Ambrose Burnside, commander of the Department of Ohio, coordinated regular and militia soldiers to cut off Morgan’s rear, blocking a southern retreat, and dispatched 8,000 Federals under Major General Henry M. Judah to hunt down Morgan’s smaller and now beleaguered command. Harried by local resistance and forced to adopt a brutal pace to escape the copious forces the Union arrayed against them, Morgan’s men and mounts broke down rapidly. As Shelby Foote summarized, “What had begun as a raid, a foray as of a fox upon a henhouse, had turned into a foxhunt – and, hunting or hunted, Morgan was still the fox.”

Driving their foe before them, the Union repeated their strategy as the irregulars entered Ohio. Once again militia barred the Rebels’ progress, while gunboats and more militia were sent to guard fords the riders might use to escape. Judah’s command continued its aggressive chase, “gobbling up” stragglers, who now numbered several hundred. Hemmed in by the array of forces that had surrounded it, Morgan and the remnants of his command were finally captured a month after they had begun their foray, near West Virginia’s panhandle.

72 Mackey, The Uncivil War, 180.
73 Foote, The Civil War, 2:681.
Morgan’s 1863 raid had failed for several reasons. First, the northern high command had used a combined arms approach in subduing the raiders and sealing off their escape with a combination of gunboats, home guard units, and Federal cavalry. Cut off from the South and closely pursued, Morgan was forced to plunge deeper into enemy territory in his effort to withdraw. Successful raids depended on maintaining the initiative, and through the Union’s response to Morgan, this was denied. The improvement of the quality in Union cavalry was demonstrated by their ability to pursue the raiders, and their constant aggressive maneuvering. Whereas earlier in the war northern cavalry had been derided for their lack of initiative and frequent defeats at the hands of their southern cousins, better training, equipment, and numbers now began to mold them into a true fighting force.

Morgan himself shares responsibility for his defeat. His lack of caution alerted his foes to his intent, and his overconfidence led to the poorly planned, reckless raid in the first place. Instead of aborting or modifying his plan once he had been discovered, Morgan continued his expedition knowing full well he had lost the element of surprise. Even worse, by raiding a northern state Morgan forfeited the popular support he enjoyed in Kentucky and was instead confronted by a hostile population that actively resisted him.

General Braxton Bragg, in a rare moment of insight, told President Davis that “General Morgan was an officer with few superiors, none, perhaps, in his own line, but that he was a dangerous man, on account of his intense desire to act independently.”

The destruction of Morgan’s cavalry deprived the South of one of its most powerful irregular tools, and its absence allowed Union General Ambrose Burnside to detach

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75 Duke, History of Morgan’s Cavalry, 321.
substantial numbers of men (perhaps 15,000) that would have otherwise been tied down
defending the railroads and depots of Tennessee and Kentucky against Rebel cavalry.  

Although improved cavalry performance and better communication between
different armed services improved the effectiveness of Federal responses to raids, the
general raiding strategy remained a potent threat, albeit with now increased risks. Forrest
remained active throughout 1863 and early 1864, instigating a series of Union counter-
raids expressly designed to destroy Forrest’s command. Instead, Forrest not only defeated
these attacks, but continued to raid in between the incursions. Throughout his campaigns
and into 1865, Sherman would display a firm respect for Forrest that was reflected in his
actions and writings.

In February 1864, after the successful conclusion of the Chattanooga campaign
that pushed the Confederates out of Tennessee, Sherman launched his Meridian
Campaign, hoping to capture Meridian’s important installations and perhaps threaten
Alabama. There were however, additional considerations to the campaign. “A chief part
of the enterprise,” Sherman wrote in his memoirs, “was to destroy the rebel cavalry
commanded by General Forrest, who was a constant threat to our railway
communications in Middle Tennessee.” The officer candidly added that “I wanted to
destroy Forrest, who, with an irregular force of cavalry was constantly threatening
Memphis and the river above as well as our routes of supply in Middle Tennessee. In this
we failed utterly.”

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76 Mackey, The Uncivil War, 191-2.
To this end, Sherman detached General Sooy Smith and 7,000 cavalry and twenty artillery pieces to bring the raider to heel. When his command met the bulk of Forrest’s 2,500 men at West Point, Mississippi on February 21, Smith lost his nerve and began a retreat. Forrest attacked his rear guard, breaking the Federal lines at Okolona and continuing a running fight that lasted eleven miles. Smith’s men, thoroughly humiliated, retreated back into Tennessee instead of joining Sherman as ordered. Despite the Union’s cavalry reforms of 1863 and their superior numbers, the Federal cavalry had been defeated again. Smith reported his losses over the course of his fifteen day foray as 700, while Forrest lost 144. Though this counter-raid had failed, the tactic would be repeated against Forrest as his foes struggled to negate the raiding threat. Ultimately, the Union strategy of counter-raids, the North’s most potent offensive response to cavalry raiders, would have mixed success in hindering the southern horsemen.

Three months after the Sooy Smith Expedition, in May, Sherman began one of the most decisive campaigns of the war, the Atlanta campaign. Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston did not dare to attack Sherman with half as many men. Instead, he ordered Forrest to attack the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad in central Tennessee upon which Sherman almost exclusively relied. Once again though, Forrest’s irregular role was thwarted by conventional concerns. In early June, Sherman sent an even larger expedition of 8,500 men of all arms to destroy, or at least distract, Forrest. In this he was aided by the Confederate High Command. President Jefferson Davis, refusing to abandon Mississippi to what looked like a full-on invasion, countermanded Johnston’s wishes and ordered Forrest to defend against Samuel D. Sturgis’s small army. By doing so, Davis

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unwittingly fulfilled Sherman’s goal of keeping Forrest occupied, instead of ignoring the offered bait and continuing irregular operations.79

On June 10, 1864, at Brice’s Crossroads, Forrest defeated this latest attempt to permanently neutralize the raiding threat he represented. There, with a force half the size of his foes, Forrest displayed once again that, although an irregular, he was the tactical equal of most commanders in either army. Surprising Sturgis by attacking unexpectedly, Forrest hurled his force at the enemy’s cavalry (alone the size of his whole command), defeating them before their infantry support could arrive. Forrest attacked the infantry in turn, sending cavalry to their rear while aggressively attacking at close range with his artillery and dismounted cavalry. The invaders retreated less 2,165 men, compared to fewer than 500 southern casualties.80

In frustration, a few days later Sherman sent yet another, larger force of 14,000 men under A. J. Smith and Joseph Mower into Mississippi for Forrest, promising to make the latter a major-general if he succeeded.81 Under the command of Stephan D. Lee, a small Confederate army, including Forrest’s troopers, was defeated at the Battle of Harrisburg. Sherman need not have worried, for Davis still refused to countenance releasing Forrest into the rear of Sherman’s army and away from Mississippi’s defense. Because of this, the Union strategy of offensive counter-raids to tie down Forrest did achieve limited success, in that he was prevented from disrupting Sherman’s campaign in Georgia.

Some realized that cavalry raids were Atlanta’s best protection. Generals Johnston, Howell Cobb, and Joseph Wheeler again asked permission to unleash raiders behind the Union lines, while Georgia Governor Joseph Brown begged the president to better use Forrest’s talents: “Could not Forrest or Morgan, or both, do more for our cause in Sherman’s rear than anywhere else?” Brown continued his argument:

He brings his supplies from Nashville, over nearly 300 miles of railroad, through a rough country, over a great number of bridges. If these are destroyed, it is impossible for him to subsist his large army, and he must fall back through a broad scope of country destitute of provisions, which he could not do without great loss, if not annihilation.\(^{82}\)

Another letter to Davis a few days later reiterated that “The whole country expects this, though points of lesser importance be for a time overrun. . . . We do not see how Forrest’s operations in Mississippi…interfere with Sherman’s plans in this state, as his supplies continue to reach him.”\(^{83}\) Such pleas fell on deaf ears, and the city fell on September 2, 1864.

Though Forrest executed successful raids before and after Sherman’s Atlanta Campaign, the opportunity for maximum strategic impact was denied to him because of his relegation to a conventional defense of territory. If the Confederate political leadership had not decided on a conventional defensive posture, the Union counter-raids could have been ignored and denied their disruptive effects. Instead Davis, himself a Mississippian, refused to abandon his constituents in the Deep South to apparent conquest. Like many West Pointers, Davis did not believe irregulars could be decisive.

To the southern president, only a large regular army like John Bell Hood’s could produce

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\(^{83}\) Brown to Davis, July 5, 1864.
the damage necessary to draw Sherman out of Georgia and threaten Lincoln’s reelection. Raiders generally, and Forrest specifically, were still potent, as demonstrated by the continued apprehension Union commanders held for him. Considering Forrest a greater threat to western Union advancement than conventional armies, Grant recommended to Sherman a few weeks after Atlanta’s capture that before he took any other action “It [would] be better to drive Forrest out of Middle Tennessee as a first step.” Sherman replied that he had already detached two additional divisions to further guard his rear, adding, “Our armies are much reduced, and if I send back any more, I will not be able to threaten Georgia much.” He suggested hastening the arrival of recruits from Indiana and Ohio to better garrison the forts.  

To many citizens across the South, Forrest’s star shone undiminished, and they still looked to “the king of cavalry” for the salvation of their cause. On October 2, in North Carolina, Catherine Edmondston wrote enthusiastically in her diary that Athens, Tennessee had been taken by the Tennessean, concluding “One more blow to Sherman’s rear.” A few days later she described how Forrest was capturing supplies “until their number seems to be legion.” The same week in Virginia, Confederate surgeon Spencer Welch wrote to his wife “Grant is evidently doing his best for Lincoln’s reelection. . . . I hope to hear good news from Forrest.” The Chattanooga Daily Rebel ran an article under the headline “How They Dread Forrest” to relate the following anecdote: When a southern lady inquired of Union General Benjamin Grierson why he had not attacked

84 Grant to Sherman, September 26, 1864, Sherman to Grant, September 26, 1864.  
85 Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, October 2, 1864, October 5, 1864. Journal of a Secesh Lady, 620, 621.  
Forrest, the officer supposedly replied, “Madame, our entire force of 7,000 cavalry would not fight one of Forrest’s brigades unless our infantry was there to support them. No one of our brigades would fight one of his regiments. No regiment a company, and no company would charge a pair of Forrest’s old boots if they were laying in the road.”

As the conventional armies of the South surrendered in 1865, some feared what would happen if irregulars like Forrest continued their asymmetric warfare. General George Thomas threatened that if Forrest continued to fight “the States of Mississippi and Alabama will be so destroyed that they will not recover for fifty years.” A northern private wrote that “Forrest was our most gallant opponent, whom we have fought with varying fortunes for the last three years through Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. He is a born leader of cavalry men, the only man left in the Confederacy who need be feared as a guerrilla chief.” Sherman had come to similar conclusions. Demonstrating just how disruptive organized irregular warfare had been, Sherman confessed to Grant that “I now apprehend that the rebel armies will disperse, and instead of dealing with six or seven States we will have to deal with numberless bands of desperadoes, headed by such men as Mosby, Forrest, Red Jackson, and others, who know not and care not for danger and its consequences.” Sherman need not have feared however, for Forrest had no intention of continuing the war after Johnston surrendered his army. Because he had not been defeated, Forrest at first resisted the idea of surrender,

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preferring exile in Mexico. Refusing to leave his men behind however, the Confederate officer finally accepted terms on May 3, 1865.

More than any other form of irregular warfare, the Confederate government had endorsed cavalry raiders. During the war, a few thousand riders under Morgan, Forrest, and a handful of other leaders had often contested the Union advance more effectively than tens of thousands of soldiers in traditional armies. Major General Dabney Maury spoke a truth reflective of cavalry raiding in general when he told Forrest, “of all the commanders of the Confederacy you are accustomed to accomplish the very greatest results with small means when left to your own untrammeled judgment.” 91 Yet despite dramatic successes, strong elements of the Confederate High Command resisted a systematic raiding strategy as a viable defense. Like other forms of irregular warfare, the initiative for cavalry raiding came exclusively from field commanders and the practitioners themselves.

When Bragg said Morgan “was a dangerous man, on account of his intense desire to act independently,” he was reflecting a typical West Point fear that by encouraging raiding, southern commanders would lose control of resources they needed to concentrate against the superior materiel of the enemy. 92 The same officer accused Forrest of a lack of cooperation, saying his escapades did not benefit his army. 93 To men like Bragg, irregulars were not real soldiers, just fighters who could not take direction. The “untrammeled judgment” that Maury endorsed was the last thing professionally trained soldiers like Bragg and Davis wished to grant. Raiders were therefore mostly used

92 Duke, History of Morgan’s Cavalry, 321.
93 Jack Hurst, Nathan Bedford Forrest, 139.
and organized ad hoc instead of systematically. Thorough students of Napoleon, many West Pointers on both sides were committed to a framework of concentrating maximum resources in order to destroy the field armies of the enemy in conventional battle. This was the antithesis of a prolonged irregular campaign against an enemy’s supplies and will to win. In refusing to countenance a raiding strategy during the Atlanta Campaign, Davis forfeited an opportunity that Grant later reflected “promised the best results of anything he [Davis] could have done.”

In fairness, the same personality traits of individualism and aggression that made raiders good irregulars could make them bad soldiers. Cavalry raiders had been better accepted and more widely adopted than other irregular warriors because they could be more easily controlled. When raiders disobeyed, it seemed to confirm that they were unreliable. And unlike partisans or guerrillas, there could be serious military consequences if a raiding party was destroyed. While two hundred partisan rangers did not represent a great investment, 3,000 cavalry troopers did, even if they were largely equipped at the enemy’s expense. After Morgan’s cavalry was destroyed, Union commanders knew they need not fear additional raids any time soon, and could therefore devote fewer troops to the rear. Like other irregulars, raiders usually enjoyed greater mobility than their foes, allowing for frequent escapes. Unlike partisans and guerrillas though, raiders had to keep their commands intact (rather than dispersing them among the populace) and return to their own lines. While raiders could achieve a level of destruction unrivaled by other irregulars, the sources of this power (their size and greater

conventionality) made them brittle, in that they could be more easily destroyed or diverted from their irregular purpose by Confederate decision-makers.

In pursuit of a logistical strategy, cavalry raiders were unrivaled. They were directly responsible for the defeat of two major offensives in the West in 1862, where long supply lines invited such a stratagem. Furthermore, Federal commanders could never fully abandon their reliance on these lines, though they tried to mitigate them through stockpiling supplies and living off the land. The initiative thus remained with the raiders, unless, as often occurred, they were subsumed into conventional activities.

In tying down great numbers of troops, the raiders were also successful. While Confederate armies were deprived of the conventional services of a few thousand troopers while they were raiding, this was more than compensated by the increased commitment of Federal resources to the rear, both in a permanent capacity as well as in temporary pursuit of the intruders. This occurred not just in Buell’s failed offensive but also later against Rosecrans and Sherman. The latter was so worried about the raiders’ destructive potential that he committed vast resources to his rear. As Sherman marched to Atlanta with his field army, an incredible 68,000 men were protecting his lines (stretching all the way back to Louisville) from irregulars.96

Cavalry raiders enjoyed equal success in fulfilling the principle of erosion. Certainly the material cost-benefit ratio of raiding operations (with the exception of Morgan’s Ohio Raid) greatly benefitted the South, as thousands of Union soldiers were killed or captured for often slim losses. Financially too, raiding caused countless millions

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96 Archer Jones, Civil War Command and Strategy, 202-3.
of dollars worth of damage to the North. Even more important and successful was the psychological aspect of erosion. As cavalry raiders operated successfully behind the enemy, they regained for the Confederacy a degree of initiative denied to it by its defensive and retreating armies. The victories of Morgan and Forrest were followed by newspapers of both sides as closely as the movements of major armies. Southern morale was often fortified when raiders provided the South with its only visible victories in the West. Union soldiers and officers were in contrast frazzled by an elusive opponent that could only be limited, not decisively defeated.

Although the Confederacy had not made a conscious effort to pursue an organized raiding strategy, the success of such actions hampered Union conquest in the West as much or more than conventional southern armies. Raiding, like other irregular forms of warfare, presented northern commanders with a problem that they could not fully solve or, perhaps, understand. That they achieved so much in light of the restricted nature of their operations evidences a greater hypothetical potential to alter the fortunes of war.
Chapter Two: Partisan Rangers

It was the night of March 8, 1863 when John Singleton Mosby and two dozen men entered the town of Fairfax, Virginia. Although it was the young officer’s first independent command, and the town was surrounded by several thousand Union troops, the Confederate soldiers had skillfully avoided enemy pickets before masquerading as Yankee cavalry to bypass enemy patrols. Impersonating dispatch riders with a message for the commanding Union officer, General Edwin Stoughton, Mosby and a few men entered his headquarters and captured the general in his bed! To discourage resistance from their prisoners, Mosby disguised their true numbers and told the general that General Jackson was in control of the town.\(^1\) The Rebels successfully escaped with the general and thirty other prisoners in tow. The first of many such daring forays, such a humiliating incident set the tone of partisan warfare in Virginia for the rest of the war.

With often no more than a hundred men at any one time, Mosby and his irregulars effectively contested the Union occupation of a sizable swath of northern Virginia, despite its proximity to the United States’ capital. By using irregular methods and tactics, the partisan rangers achieved results totally disproportionate to their numbers. This success was not limited merely to tactical or operational victories, but, most importantly, was also displayed in the tangible impact on the respective morale of the forces engaged; undermining Union resolve while bolstering that of the Confederate citizenry. Mosby and his men thus embodied the pinnacle of partisan warfare; for little cost in men and

material, the Confederacy inflicted sharp military and political reverses on a foe that possessed much greater resources.²

Partisan rangers could in theory achieve all principles of irregular warfare; thwarting enemy advances by the disruption of supplies, and undermining their psychological and material capability to continue the war through the constant small victories they achieved. Professor Francis Lieber, the legal expert consulted by the Union War Department to define the parameters of lawful conduct and combatants of war, recognized these functions when he wrote:

The partisan leader commands a corps whose object is to injure the enemy by action separate from that of his own main army; the partisan acts chiefly upon the enemy’s lines of connection and communication, and outside of or beyond the operation of his own army, in the rear and on the flanks of the enemy. Rapid and varying movements and surprises are the chief means of his success.³

These attacks served a further purpose: the diversion of troops. “The primary object of partisan warfare,” Mosby reflected after the war, “should be to neutralize as large a portion as possible of the enemy’s force by keeping up a continuous alarm for the safety of his communications and his line of supply. Every man detached from the front to guard the rear of an invading army is so much subtracted from its aggressive

² Several biographies have been written on Mosby, including the classic, Virgil Carrington Jones, Ranger Mosby (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1944); James Ramage, Grey Ghost, the Life of Col. John Singleton Mosby (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999); and Kevin Siepal, Rebel, the Life and Times of John Singleton Mosby (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983). For an examination of the effectiveness of partisan rangers and Mosby, see Robert Mackey, The Uncivil War: Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861-1865 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

If successful, these diversions could help rectify the great imbalance of manpower that existed between North and South. Partisan rangers like Mosby and John McNeill utilized the “rapid and varying movements and surprises” Lieber described to take advantage of the inherently vulnerable state of logistical installations that stretched all the way from the enemy’s field armies to the source of supplies, potentially hundreds of miles away in theoretically friendly (or at least occupied) territory. As Mosby said; “A small force moving with celerity and threatening many points on a line can neutralize a hundred times its own number. The line must be stronger at every point than the attacking force, else it is broken.” Partisan rangers demonstrated this inherent strength throughout the war.

Partisan rangers in the Confederacy were organized under the auspices of the Partisan Ranger Act. Enacted on April 21, 1862, the law was intended to control and direct the efforts of guerrillas already waging war in the Trans-Mississippi Department. As one historian describes them, “Bands of bushwhackers had sprung up spontaneously all along the border among Southerners trapped behind Union lines. . . . In 1862 the Confederate government sought to license and therefore control these bands under the Partisan Ranger Act.” Rather than trying to expand irregular warfare, the Act was actually meant to limit its dimensions, a reality the Confederate War Department freely acknowledged. In fact, the government had from 1861 refused to accept many companies

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4 Mosby, John Singleton Mosby Scrapbooks, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia, quoted in James Ramage, Grey Ghost, 247-8.
6 Michael Fellman, Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War (New York, Oxford University Press, 1989), 97.
that volunteered for “independent service.” While intended to control units in the western reaches of the Confederacy, the most effective partisan rangers operated in the East.

For enterprising regulars like Mosby or McNeil though, the act allowed a previously impossible display of initiative. Under the Act, authorized officers could form company to regiment-sized bands of rangers. These men were to be enlisted, “and subject to the same regulations as other soldiers.” As an incentive to focus on military targets and discourage looting (guerrilla weaknesses), any equipment the partisans captured could be sold back to the Confederate War Department. While Mosby believed this profit-motive was crucial to the morale of his command, it also encouraged Union commanders to view these irregulars as brigands, indistinguishable from the guerrilla marauders operating in the West. None the less, the Partisan Ranger Act, in holding partisan commands to the same standards of discipline and conduct as regular soldiers, reflected Leiber’s own views about their legitimacy when he concluded that despite their irregular tactics partisans were “part and parcel of the army and, as such, considered entitled to the privileges of the law of war, so long as he does not transgress it.”

Simply put, partisan warfare contested what would otherwise have been the unchallenged occupation of Confederate territory. That physical territory itself played an

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10 Francis Lieber, “Guerrilla Parties Considered with Reference to the Laws and Usages of War,” 11.
important part in the conduct of partisan operations. Although partisan operations were conducted throughout the South, they were at their most visible, and effective, in the occupied areas of northern Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley, and the South Branch Valley of modern-day West Virginia’s eastern panhandle. In these contested areas, political and geographical circumstances intersected to allow partisan rangers to demonstrate the possibilities of irregular warfare.

The area that would become known as “Mosby’s Confederacy” during the war was centered around Fauquier and Loudoun counties in northern Virginia. These were two of the richest agricultural counties in Virginia, and the corn and wheat grown there helped to supply Mosby and his men. With slave populations on par with or higher than the rest of Virginia, the counties were unsurprisingly pro-Confederate, though there was a faction of Quakers and German immigrants in the eastern part of Loudoun that had opposed secession.\footnote{Loudoun Museum, “Loudoun History,” Loudoun Museum, \url{http://www.loudounmuseum.org/loudoun-history/} (accessed October 6, 2013).} Loudon County was divided by the Catoctin-Bull Run Mountains. Ideal regions to retreat undetected into, it was to his foe’s use of mountainous topography that Union General Phillip Sheridan later attributed his inability to defeat Mosby.\footnote{Phillip Sheridan, \textit{Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan} (1888, reprint, St. Clair Shores, Michigan: 1977) vol. 2, 99-100.} “Mosby’s Confederacy” therefore supplied its chief with a sympathetic populace and a bountiful region with ample places to hide. A scarce forty miles away from this base lay Washington D.C., capital of the Union. While this proximity to the military and political center of the foe undoubtedly insured that substantial resources would be deployed against the nearby irregulars, it also promised a host of valuable targets and a captivated audience (on both sides) for Mosby’s exploits, thereby increasing their propaganda effect.
John McNeill and his men were based out of Hardy and Hampshire counties. Located in the South Branch Valley, Hardy County was, like Fauquier and Loudoun counties, agriculturally rich and distinctively pro-slavery. Watered by a branch of the Potomac River, the county was flanked by mountains much more rugged than those in Loudoun; the heavily-wooded Alleghany Plateau.13 From this stronghold, McNeill and his men threatened the important Baltimore and Ohio railroad, and also often descended into the Shenandoah Valley to raid supply lines there. These forays were mirrored by Mosby, who frequently ventured beyond his base to engage in similar activities.

For the Union, these areas were logistically crucial. Fauquier County’s importance lay in the presence of the Rappahannock River on its border, and the Orange & Alexandria railroad that ran through it. Both were irreplaceable corridors through which the Union delivered troops and supplies into the battlegrounds of Virginia. The O. & A. railroad, a frequent target of Mosby’s men, was the most direct land route from D.C. to Richmond, and hence subject to frequent and heavy traffic.14 The B. & O. railroad linked D.C. to the West, and funneled countless thousands of troops and supplies into Virginia and other theatres of war. These railroads, the most important Union lines of the war, were essential in delivering the material superiority of the North to where it needed to go. If the Union could not control these lines, the advantages it derived from its greater wealth and numbers would be lessened. Such important infrastructure also heightened the importance and publicity of partisan operations in the area.

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Partisan ranger units could not achieve their maximum effectiveness without the active support of the local populace, from whom they derived recruits, shelter, sustenance, concealment, and intelligence. Civilian guides helped Mosby elude pursuing cavalry, and civilian homes boarded his troopers in between forays, thereby avoiding a conspicuous concentration. Mosby’s men cultivated this sentiment by sometimes sharing captured foodstuffs with their civilian supporters and always representing themselves as defenders of the people. In addition, the hostility of the populace furthered the occupier’s uneasiness. One Union cavalryman observed that “Every farmhouse in this section was a refuge for guerrillas, and every farmer was an ally of Mosby, and every farmer’s son was with him, or in the Confederate army.” The frustration of governing an antagonistic population thus further strained the morale of occupying Federal soldiers, who could not even feel safe in a place supposedly behind the front lines.

Due to the independent and unconventional nature of irregular warfare, personality played a central role in the effectiveness of partisan units. The most famous practitioners, John Singleton Mosby and John McNeill, shared certain characteristics that would benefit their operations. Both were self-reliant. McNeill had left Virginia for Missouri in 1848, and prospered as a middle-class farmer nationally renowned for his shorthorn cattle. Mosby had studied to become a lawyer while in prison for shooting an

16 Charles Alfred Humphreys, Field, Camp, Hospital, and Prison in the Civil War, 1863-1865 (Boston, Geo. H. Ellis Co., 1918), 105.
aggressive bully in college.\textsuperscript{18} Equally vital for detached service was the professionalism and discipline both men possessed, no doubt reinforced by the time both men had spent with the regular Confederate army early in the war (rather than as civilian guerrillas). This discipline allowed both leaders to hold their units together behind enemy lines, to focus on militarily important targets rather than civilian plunder, and in general to operate with speed and efficiency. Partisan rangers therefore enjoyed the independence and initiative of guerrillas while benefitting from the superior organization and discipline of regular forces. As Mosby observed, “We just maintained our individuality and at the same time a cohesiveness and went to the task.”\textsuperscript{19}

Perhaps just as important though, was the background both men lacked. Neither had received a military education at West Point, Virginia Military Institute, or a similar institution. This allowed both partisan commanders to be unfettered by conventional understandings of set-piece battles and campaigns that focused on destroying the enemy’s field forces. Instead, both McNeill and Mosby grasped that by attacking vulnerable targets in unexpected places, they could cause consternation disproportionate to their numbers.

Mosby personally picked every man who entered his unit, carefully vetting would-be recruits for deserters or outlaws.\textsuperscript{20} This ensured the recruits accepted would be highly motivated and disciplined. It also minimized tensions between the irregulars and the conventional military, some of whom were suspicious of the ranger units luring away their enlisted soldiers. When such careful procedures were not followed, partisan


\textsuperscript{19} Newspaper Clipping, vol. 5, John Singleton Mosby Scrap Book-University of Virginia, quoted in James Ramage, \textit{Grey Ghost}, 104.

\textsuperscript{20} James Ramage, \textit{Grey Ghost}, 97-8.
commands could be considerably disrupted. John McNeill’s failure to properly scrutinize his command for deserters, and his refusal to return such men to the conventional Confederate army, led to his court-martial in 1864. McNeill was acquitted, no doubt in part because of his marked military successes. When Harry Gilmor, the Maryland aristocrat who commanded the 2nd Maryland Battalion based in the Shenandoah Valley, allowed such men to join his partisan outfit, the result was severe discipline problems that, combined with Gilmor’s lax restraint, led to looting and the ire of both Confederate civilians and government officials.21

The demographics of partisan recruits reflect both the appeal and the relatively broad acceptance the unconventional soldiers enjoyed in southern society. Although around ten percent of Mosby’s men were veterans of other cavalry units, many were “non-conscripts,” those exempt from military duty because of their age (young or old), occupation, or prior injuries.22 This further smoothed relations with Confederate leadership, as the partisans were not diminishing the front-line battle strength of their armies. It also maximized the cost-benefit ratio of partisan operations, by minimizing the manpower resources southerners risked in the irregular war.

Recruits spanned the socio-economic gauntlet of Antebellum society, from local farmers and shopkeepers to the son of Virginia Governor William Smith. Eighty percent of Mosby’s men came from Virginia, another eight percent from Maryland, and a total of

21 Kevin Ruffner, “‘More Trouble Than A Brigade’; Harry Gilmor’s 2nd Maryland Cavalry in the Shenandoah Valley,” Maryland Historical Society 89, vol. 4 (1994), 394-5, 401. Gilmor’s unit was first organized as the 1st Maryland Battalion. Gilmor was court-martialed following an incident in which his men robbed civilians. He was acquitted.

twenty-eight percent came from Loudoun and Fauquier counties.\textsuperscript{23} Other soldiers came from farther afield, such as Bradford Smith Hoskins, an Englishman who had been a captain in the Coldstream Guards, and Private Baron Robert von Massow, son of the Prussian king’s chamberlain, and future leader of the German IX Corps in World War I.\textsuperscript{24} The men who would become partisan rangers joined for a variety of reasons, some seeking adventure while others enjoyed remaining near home and perhaps profiting from the sale of captured material.

When reviewing the exploits of McNeill and Mosby, it becomes clear that with a single operation, partisan rangers could accomplish multiple irregular aspirations simultaneously. Nonetheless, certain operations are particularly indicative of the damage partisans wrought in light of the three principles of logistics, erosion of Union strength in terms of material or morale, or the diversion of troops. Regardless of its military implications, each of these actions was executed by a comparatively small group of men, usually operating against great odds.

The logistical impact of partisan ranger forays, while not as decisive as cavalry raiders due to their smaller size and lack of artillery, could nevertheless be considerable. One of the largest strikes of this nature occurred in the wake of the Gettysburg campaign. General George Meade, having advanced his Union army into Northern Virginia in pursuit of Lee, neglected to provide adequate protection for the large number of sutler and army wagons traveling from D.C. to his location. Over the course of two weeks, with less than thirty men and only seven miles from the Federal capital, Mosby captured


\textsuperscript{24} Virgil Carrington Jones, \textit{Ranger Mosby}, 84; Robert R. Mackey, \textit{The Uncivil War}, 82.
roughly 118 wagons laden with supplies.\textsuperscript{25} When it is considered that a single fully laden wagon carried 2,674 pounds of rations, the logistical toll the Confederate officer extracted (without loss to his command) becomes apparent.\textsuperscript{26}

Demonstrating the multi-faceted consequences of each foray, these attacks also injured Union morale, thus achieving the “erosion” principle. As so many had before, one northern journalist expressed outrage, tinged with wonder, at the brazen impudence of Mosby’s rangers, seemingly un-checked by Union authorities:

Moseby, like Baquo’s ghost, is up and down again, and in all sorts of unquestionable and questionable shapes. There is no telling when and where he will next appear. . . . This indefatigable guerilla chief captured . . . sutler wagons . . . laden with goods for the Army of the Potomac. Information was given, and our cavalry started immediately in pursuit, with the usual success. . . . It is certainly very apparent that we should have more cavalry in this department, as it is a growing shame that this small band should place an embargo on our sutlers, as it really distresses both officers and privates.\textsuperscript{27}

Not only had the “embargo” distressed “both officers and privates,” it provoked criticism of Union decision-makers and led to calls for reinforcements, the very action Mosby hoped to provoke in order to divert resources away from the forces arrayed against General Robert E. Lee.

\textsuperscript{25} James Ramage, \textit{Grey Ghost}, 105.
\textsuperscript{27} Unknown, “Another Raid by Moseby.” \textit{Daily Constitutional Union}, August 12, 1863. http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=J5CX56ARMTM2NTYyNDAwNi4yNzU2ODY6MToxMzQuMzQuMTI2Lj44LjU1&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=12&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=12&p_docnum=5&p_docref=v2:11A0F542977C4888@EANX-11B2BCF5E838BCD8@2401730-11B2BCF5F6FBAB18@1-11B2BCF62CD50148@Another+Raid+by+Moseby.+More+Sutlers'+27+Wagons+Captured (accessed April 10, 2013).
McNeill’s rangers accomplished equally impressive destruction. With a mere sixty men, McNeill set out from Hardy County in early May of 1864 towards the town of Piedmont, near the Maryland border. Not only did the B. & O. railroad run through Piedmont, but the town also contained extensive railroad machine shops and stores. Its importance was demonstrated by the telegram railroad president J.W. Garrett sent to Union General Franz Sigel, commander of Union forces in the Shenandoah Valley, when he discovered the town was threatened:

I fear the number of troops for defense of that part of the line is too limited to prevent great disaster. Piedmont, as we have heretofore advised you, is a point of the greatest importance for working the road, the machinery, shops, &c., being a vital necessity for that part of the line. I need not urge upon you the importance in the present necessity of the Government for large transportation, of doing all that is possible in the prompt disposition of forces to protect and preserve from destruction the work and structures of the company.28

Capturing the town proved to be easy, despite a telegraphed warning to Union garrisons stationed to the east. After detaching eleven men to halt any trains that might enter the town (carrying troops or raising the alarm), McNeill and his men utilized the surrounding overgrowth to infiltrate the town itself before surprising the small garrison and demanding its surrender.29 In less than an hour, the Rebels razed seven railroad shops, nine locomotives, dozens of loaded freight cars, machine and paint shops, and sent another six locomotives with full steam toward the neighboring town of New Creek. McNeill’s small detachment had, in the meantime, captured and destroyed two fully loaded commissary trains, and a mail train carrying a hundred soldiers, now prisoners.

28 J.W. Garrett to Gen. Franz Sigel, May 5, 1864. United States War Department, Official Records of the War of Rebellion, (ser. 1) vol. 37, pt. 1: 383. Sigel did not receive this message until after the attack was over.
Thirty-four horses had also been captured. The damage amounted to hundreds of thousands, possibly even a million, dollars. When a slow-moving Federal detachment finally approached, McNeill and his men slipped away, without loss.\textsuperscript{30}

Beyond its immediate and severe damage to vital infrastructure, the strike would affect Sigel’s campaign for control of the Shenandoah Valley. Control of the Valley could deprive the South of its agricultural produce, protect Washington, and threaten Lee’s army. Regardless, this attack, resulting from the “entire exposure of so extensive and important a point,” combined with the harassing attacks of Mosby upon his communications, forced the German officer to dispatch 800 cavalry to his rear to catch Mosby and, with other troops diverted from Ohio and West Virginia, defend his rear from future attacks.\textsuperscript{31} The Union army was thus slowed, allowing Confederate General John Breckinridge time to gather the army that would defeat Sigel at the Battle of New Market on May 15.\textsuperscript{32}

In August of 1864, Mosby performed another feat of logistical destruction that would have political and operational implications when he executed the famous “Great Wagon Raid” against General Phillip Sheridan’s supply lines during the latter’s Valley Campaign. Sheridan’s priority as commander of the Army of the Shenandoah was to destroy Jubal Early’s army, advance to Staunton (110 miles up the valley), and threaten


Lee’s position in Petersburg. Sheridan’s plan was frustrated by the Confederate retreat up the valley and the need to adequately protect his supply train of over 500 wagons. Hesitant to dissipate his front line strength through rear-guard duty, “Little Phil” only designated 931 men for the task, rather than the 2,000 such a mission called for. The decision would provide Mosby the opportunity to conduct one of his most influential actions of the war.

Once again, surprise was paramount to Mosby’s success. The slow-moving wagon train had become strung out over a length of three miles along the Berryville-Harpers Ferry Turnpike, leaving dangerous gaps in its escort. Mosby, seeing this weakness, collected 250 men to cause havoc in the Union rear. On August 13, when part of the train parked near a creek to water its animals, Mosby unleashed his men. As James Williamson, a partisan ranger, later recalled, “The Federals did not at first seem to realize their situation and made no preparations to repel an assault.” After routing the small guard, the Confederates killed or wounded fifteen men, and captured 200 other soldiers, 420 mules, 200 cattle, thirty-six horses, and destroyed forty-two full wagons. In exchange Mosby had only lost two dead and three wounded.

As had happened in the aftermath of Mosby’s other exploits, the newspapers of both sides rang with hyperbole, bolstering the spirits of southern readers while yet again embarrassing the North. The *Richmond Whig* reported that seventy-five wagons had been

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captured or destroyed, and 600 mules and horses captured.\textsuperscript{36} A Wisconsin paper multiplied the number of captured wagons to 300.\textsuperscript{37} Other articles accused the government of incompetence. “Ashby’s Gap and Saicker’s Gap should be held,” stated Union-occupied New Orleans’ \textit{Daily True Delta}. “Indeed, it was the raid of the notorious Mosby through the two latter, which, by some extraordinary oversight, were left open, that enabled him to get upon Sheridan’s communications, and, by breaking up the latter’s baggage train, to force him to abandon his first attempt to gain possession of the valley.”\textsuperscript{38} Another newspaper was even more damning in its conclusions: “We provide our Southern brethren with arms with which to fight us, teams [of horses or mules]…with which to haul their supplies…whilst engaged in attempting to destroy our Government. . . . The question naturally arises, are we in a condition to make these often repeated sacrifices? . . . Surely someone is to blame.”\textsuperscript{39} Many in the North thus doubted the government’s capacity to effectively wage the war. And Mosby continued to function as an almost magical figure that could thwart the advance of whole armies. Sheridan’s retreat down the Valley had been attributed, not to Early’s reinforced army, but rather the actions of roughly two hundred men. Despite its small size, few units on either side had so actively shaped battlefield dynamics or public opinion as Mosby’s partisan rangers.


\textsuperscript{39} Unknown, “Latest from the Valley. Correspondence of the Baltimore, American.” \textit{Daily National Intelligencer}, September 7, 1864. \url{http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/HistArchive?d_viewref=doc&p_docnum=1&p_nbid=D56N4DNIMTM2NTkwMDQxMS43NDQ1OTQ6MToxMzoxMzoxMzoxMzoxMTI2Ljc4Ljg2&f_docref=v2:109E2A3EA01155D8@EANX-12996444723F20F0@2402122-1299644974C4390@0&toc=true&docref=v2:109E2A3EA01155D8@EANX-12996444723F20F0@2402122-12996444CAF154A0@2-12996448C2C4FC00@Latest%20from%20the%20Valley.%20Correspondence%20of%20the%20Baltimore%20American (accessed April 13, 2013).
Operationally, the “Great Wagon Raid” forced Sheridan to delegate a greater proportion of his army to guard duty, demonstrating the irregular principle of diversion of troops. Couriers were required to be accompanied by ten cavalrmen, and William L. Curry’s 3rd Brigade, 1,800 men, was permanently assigned to wagon guard duty.40 One of the best brigades available to Sheridan, its presence, along with the thousands of other troops assigned to rear guard duty, would be missed in all three of Sheridan’s Valley campaign battles.41 Sheridan later admitted that “During the entire campaign I had been annoyed by guerrilla bands under such partisan chiefs as Mosby, White, Gilmore, McNeil, and others, and this had considerably depleted my line-of-battle strength, necessitating as it did large escorts for my supply trains. The most redoubtable of these leaders was Mosby.”42 In distracting Union commanders and consciously forcing them to disperse their resources in this manner, partisan rangers such as Mosby and McNeill demonstrated a commitment to aiding the conventional Confederate forces and transcending local concerns in a way that would have been impossible for guerrillas to display.

These large-scale attacks, launched to achieve the specific objective of directly hindering the logistical life lines necessary for a sustained offensive (the “logistical strategy” of irregular warfare), were accompanied over the course of the war with scores of larger or smaller forays directed towards other enemy soldiers and possessions. It was these countless strikes that embodied the “erosion” principle of irregular warfare, and

41 James Ramage, Grey Ghost, 191.
their impact often went well beyond their immediate material results. Although these
attacks also often resulted in infrastructure damage and, ultimately, the large diversion of
soldiers to the rear, these operations, unlike the previously mentioned episodes, were less
concerned with the direct military consequences than with the “cost/benefit” ratio of the
outcome. This was not limited merely to the physical dimension of casualties inflicted
and dollars lost, important though these factors were. Rather, the psychological effects of
partisan warfare bolstered southern morale while wearing down that of the Union through
the constant embarrassing reverses they inflicted on Federal troops apparently powerless
to stop them. It was the cumulative effects of these attacks that so frustrated northern
commanders, and that partisans hoped would ultimately undermine the Union war effort.

The more visible the success, the more this propaganda component of the erosion
strategy was amplified. Mosby’s first mission as a partisan ranger, the capture of General
Stoughton deep behind enemy lines, was among the most politically embarrassing for his
opponents, rivaling his “Great Wagon Raid” in how incompetent it made his foes appear.
The incident made northern commanders look impotent and Mosby famous. One Yankee
officer admitted to a superior that the foray “occurred eight or 10 miles in the rear of my
command, while the Third Brigade [his own command] was not called upon to fire a
shot. The maurauders [sic] passed entirely around me.”43 The subsequent increase in
guard duty and the fear of being “gobbled up” by Mosby’s men so damaged Federal
morale in the area that one company of the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry mutinied rather

43 Alexander Hayes to John B. McFadden, March 11, 1863, in Life and Letters of Alexander Hayes, Brevet
Colonel United States Army, Brigadier General and Brevet Major General United States Volunteers, ed.
George Thornton Fleming (Pittsburgh: Privately published, 1919), 333.
http://solomon.cwld.alexanderstreet.com/cgi-bin/asp/philo/getobject.pl?c.8008:1.cwld.918.926 (accessed
April 3, 2013).
than go on picket."\textsuperscript{44} Meanwhile, southerners rejoiced. Stuart proclaimed it was a "feat unparalleled in the war."\textsuperscript{45} The \textit{Southern Illustrated News} declared that Mosby had "made an enviable reputation, and is destined to achieve a fame not surpassed by any chief of scouts in the Confederacy."\textsuperscript{46}

A few months before, on February 16, 1863, John McNeill performed another feat of irregular warfare that showed the disparity between the resources risked and the victory gained when surprise was applied. It was broad daylight when the Federal wagon train was attacked on the Northwestern Turnpike, several miles from the town of Romney. The defenders numbered one hundred and fifty cavalry and infantry, while McNeill led a mere twenty-two rangers. Utilizing the infamous "Rebel yell" and a mad dash towards the bewildered Yankee defenders, the Confederates succeeded in quickly putting the latter to rout. The spoils included twenty-seven loaded wagons, 106 horses, seventy-two prisoners, and their equipment. The rangers retired with their booty without injury, despite being "hotly pursued."\textsuperscript{47} McNeill had captured more than three times as many men as the size of his entire force, along with other valuable assets. To achieve such ends without loss, and repetitively, heightened the corrosive affect these relatively small actions had on Union capabilities. Like other partisan actions, this small event


\textsuperscript{45} J.E.B. Stuart to Headquarters Cavalry Division, March 12, 1863. United States War Department, \textit{Official Records of the War of Rebellion}, (ser. 1) vol. 25, pt. 2: 856.

\textsuperscript{46} Unknown, "The Times." \textit{Southern Illustrated News}, April 4, 1863. http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HisArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=E57K58CTM7M2NTAxMTEyOS45NTUwNDc6MToxMzoxMsQuMTI2Ljc4LjQ0&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=5&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=5&p_docnum=7&p_docref=v2:14137A37A2AE60C@EANX-14181129B8FFFAE0@2401600-141717A59143BD20@1-141CCC6488333DAB@The+Times (accessed April 3, 2013).

earned its commander widespread praise throughout the South. Lee complimented McNeill’s “skill and daring,” while the attack, modest though it was, made front-page news. Augusta’s *Daily Constitutionalist* exclaimed that “A few companies like McNeill’s, led by such fearless chieftains, would soon rid our exposed border counties of every abolition hoof that presses the sacred soil of the Ancient Dominion.” As their triumphs grew in number, McNeill and Mosby would both become heroes that many in the South placed their trust in.

Few irregular actions though could rival that performed by McNeill’s Rangers in the closing months of the war. This partisan band had suffered a serious blow in October 1864 when their leader was mortally wounded in a skirmish. The battalion did not disintegrate as might have been expected though. Instead, John McNeill’s son Jessie assumed command, and continued to lead these southern irregulars successfully for the duration of the war. Their last action of note was perhaps their greatest: the capture of two Union generals behind enemy lines.

It was February 21, 1865 when the rangers descended onto the town of Cumberland, Maryland. The base of operations for Union efforts to protect the B. & O. railroad, Cumberland was the H.Q. for approximately 7,000 Federal troops. The

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49 Unknown, “Caught Again—Another Successful Dash at a Yankee Train.” *Georgia Daily Constitutionalist*, February 27, 1863, [http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbidx=663X60SVMTM4MTcwMTc5NS45NzI2MTY6MToxMzxMzQuMTI2Ljc4Ljg5&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=2&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=2&p_docnumber=569&p_docref=v2:1395DC574E208F55@EANX-13BBDE52A872F718@2401564-13B795C1E246B0F0@0-13C0D137F72E7363@Caught%20Again--Another%20Successful%20Dash%20At](http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbidx=663X60SVMTM4MTcwMTc5NS45NzI2MTY6MToxMzxMzQuMTI2Ljc4Ljg5&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=2&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=2&p_docnumber=569&p_docref=v2:1395DC574E208F55@EANX-13BBDE52A872F718@2401564-13B795C1E246B0F0@0-13C0D137F72E7363@Caught%20Again--Another%20Successful%20Dash%20At) (accessed October 13, 2013).
Confederates numbered only sixty-three men. A few days before the kidnapping, the partisan commander had sent scouts into Cumberland, and consulted a sympathetic railroad worker on conditions within the city, thereby learning the location of the commanding officers’ headquarters. Within were Major General George Crook, commander of the Department of Western Virginia, and Brigadier General Benjamin F. Kelley, the officer charged with defending the B. & O. railroad for most of the war. In the early gray of dawn, when the poor light could not distinguish between blue and grey, the attackers seized the outlying pickets before entering the town as if they were conventional Yankee cavalry. The pertinent houses were near each other, so Captain McNeill divided his command, and discreetly captured both officers in their beds before quickly leaving the city. Though a pursuit was launched, the perpetrators traveled over ninety miles in twenty-four hours to affect their escape. Both captured officers were later exchanged.

As was to be expected, the media erupted in surprise, praise, and outrage. Philadelphia’s The Daily Age admitted that the capture was “a complete surprise, and one of the most daring feats of the war.” The same article noted the fact “that two generals, quartered in the very heart of the town, could be seized and carried off, is one of the strangest things ever heard of.” The Daily Richmond Enquirer meanwhile described the

52 Unknown, “The Capture of Generals Kelly and Crook and Captain Thayer Melvin.” The Daily Age, February 25, 1865. http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=K6FJ63QYMTM4MjQ2NTU1Ny40NTAxODM6MToxMzoxMzoxMTU2Ljc4Ljk1&p_action=doc&s_lastnissuequeryname=2&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=2&p_docnum=82&p_docref=v2:11BE9BF1B782297@EANX-11C2E75E5AD8AA58@2402293-11C1524B16BA9E68@0-
event as “a streak of sunshine” in what was undoubtedly otherwise a cloudy sky by 1865. The paper also printed Lee’s announcement of the act, in which the general praised McNeill and his men for their “bold exploit.”  

Like his counterpart to the west, Mosby still operated with relative freedom in 1865 as traditional Confederate forces dissolved around him. Moreover, he remained a source of embarrassment to the Union War Department. After capturing yet another company-sized Union detachment in February, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton telegraphed Grant that “The frequent surprises in Sheridan’s command had excited a good deal of observation recently. . . . Can you excite more vigilance?” A few days later, Stanton was more direct, issuing a scathing rebuke to Sheridan: “The frequent disasters in your command have occasioned much regret in this Department, as indicating a want of vigilance and discipline which, if not speedily cured, may occasion greater misfortune.” Sheridan, the general who had won a series of notable victories against a corps from the Army of Northern Virginia, and had taken the strategically crucial Shenandoah Valley, was being made to look inept by a colonel who only led a few hundred men.

12A04B6F28E9B427@The%20Capture%20of%20Generals%20Kelly%20and%20Crook%20and%20Captain%20Thayer%20Melvin (accessed October 22, 2013).

Unknown, “A Streak of Sunshine - A Couple Yankee Generals Captured.” The Daily Richmond Enquirer, February 25, 1865. http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbids=k6fj63qytm4mjq2ntu1ny40ntaxodm6mtoxmzozmqumt12ljckljk1&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=2&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=2&p_docnum=85&p_docref=v2:10ce11449f49c7e8@eanx-119ea22b422fc824022293-119ea22b6d88efc8@0-119ea22ba16d05a8@the%20news%20of%20s%20streak%20of%20sunshine-a%20couple%20of%20yankee%20generals%20captured (accessed October 22, 2013).

Stanton to Grant, February 20, 1865. United States War Department, Official Records, (ser. 1) vol. 46, pt. 2: 608.

Against such incessant stings, Union commanders reacted with a variety of counter measures. The eventual scale and intensity of these efforts attest to the threat partisan rangers posed to Union war efforts. These measures ranged from the legal to the physical, from passive defenses to active expeditions, and sought variously to isolate the irregulars from their civilian support, to destroy the raiders themselves as a unit, or to neutralize the effects of their forays through better security. Though varying in effectiveness, none could completely neutralize the threat partisans posed.

The first line of defense against partisans was that of words and perception. Practiced throughout the war by northern authorities, it was in large part due to Confederate irregular activities, guerrilla, partisan, and cavalry raiders, that Professor Lieber had been consulted in late 1862 to define the parameters of legal war. Although Lieber’s conclusions supported the legal status of partisan rangers and cavalry raiders, many Union commanders and newspapers disagreed, and branded men like Mosby to be bushwhackers and thieves. In desperation, hostages were sometimes taken; southern sympathizers were put on vulnerable trains, and McNeill’s family was imprisoned during the summer of 1863. Neither action, legally questionable themselves, dissuaded the Confederates from continuing their attacks. Regardless, criminalization of irregular acts gave the North latitude to deal with captured partisans harshly. Ulysses S. Grant told Sheridan in 1864 to “hang Mosby’s men without trial,” an order that Sheridan carried out a number of times on captured prisoners. After one particular engagement, six rangers

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57 Grant to Sheridan, August 16, 1864, Sheridan to Grant, August 17, 1864, Sheridan to Grant August 19, 1864, Sheridan to Grant, August 22, 1864. United States War Department, *Official Records*, (ser. 1), vol.
were captured. Union brigade commander George Custer ordered them to be executed, one hanging body displaying a sign that read, “This will be the fate of Mosby and all his men.” Mosby, with Lee’s permission, executed five prisoners in turn, and sent word to his foe that such actions would not reoccur if his men were treated properly when captured. After that, Mosby’s rangers were never executed after capture, though often denied parole. One northern officer claimed it necessary to refuse partisan rangers exchange because “one of them would give more trouble to us than half a dozen ordinary soldiers.”

Legal repercussions and moralistic accusations failed to dissuade partisan actions, in part because Union authorities did not want to encourage reprisals against captured Federal soldiers, but also because partisan rangers and southern society as a whole recognized their efforts as legitimate warfare. Throughout the war, northern officials attempted to isolate the partisans from their civilian support. Private property, ranging from crops, livestock, and barns, to homes and towns, was threatened or destroyed in reaction to partisan attacks. This strategy stemmed not only from the immense tangible support partisans like Mosby received from the locals but also from the mistaken belief that Mosby and his men were guerrillas, and thus were the locals. Guerrillas were, in theory, an extension of the community. By exerting pressure onto the community, the Union leaders hoped the community would presumably curtail its own guerrillas by asserting social pressure.

43 pt. 1: 811, 822, 841, 880. Although Sheridan thought he was executing Mosby’s men, they were usually other partisans, Confederates, or guerrillas. Ramage, Grey Ghost, 194.
58 Virgil Carrington Jones, Ranger Mosby, 209,11.
Logical in its conception, this strategy bore mixed results against actual guerrillas in the Trans-Mississippi. In Virginia, it had even less effect on Mosby and McNeill. As is evidenced by their continued reliance on civilians for provision, shelter, and intelligence, both irregular chieftains maintained the support of the population in their area of operations. This was probably in large part because neither preyed upon the vulnerable inhabitants; even the Unionists were safe. That the local population largely remained loyal and supportive to the Confederate irregulars is testament both to the former’s ideological resolve and the success of partisan chieftains in maintaining control of their men and the region.

This is not to say that the residents of Virginia never felt strain for their convictions. In February 1863, after a spate of Mosby attacks, occupying forces threatened the town of Middleburg with destruction if the harassment continued. When the citizenry of Middleburg petitioned Mosby to cease his partisan activities in the area, he responded with a statement that displayed both his priorities and legal acumen:

I unhesitatingly refuse to comply. My attacks on scouts, patrols and pickets, which have provoked this threat, are sanctioned both by the custom of war and the practice of the enemy; and you are at liberty to inform them that no such clamor shall deter me from employing whatever legitimate weapons I can most efficiently use for their annoyance.  

While the incident showed that there were limits to what civilians would bare, it is important to note that their displeasure did not dissuade Mosby from continuing his operations. He also continued to enjoy widespread support, even, apparently, in Middleburg (which was not burned down). In June that same year, when Mosby captured

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two of General Joseph Hooker’s staff officers “a la General Stoughton,” all the adult males of the nearby town of Middleburg were arrested under suspicion of aiding Mosby, and all houses were ordered searched for hidden soldiers. Evidently the townsfolk had not lost their ardor for the cause, even if their direct involvement was less than the occupiers suspected.

Developing parallel to the moral and legal arguments against irregulars, steps were also taken to better defend tempting targets such as trains and bridges through their fortification, as discussed in chapter one. Without the artillery that only cavalry raiders regularly possessed, it was often difficult for other irregulars to take blockhouses through direct assault. Even so, the Union found it impossible to adequately fortify all potential weak points, so Mosby and others often simply bypassed these areas. When they could not, the rangers frequently used surprise and intimidation to quell resistance or obtain surrender before a protracted struggle occurred. Trains were also sometimes armored and loop-holed to protect the troops inside from ambush. These efforts were accompanied by numerous patrols and the deployment of tens of thousands of troops to guard the vital railroads. Despite this effort, Mosby and McNeill continued their war virtually unchecked. Indeed, after Mosby’s famous “Greenback Raid” during the autumn of 1864, in which he destroyed a B. & O. train and seized a pay chest containing $173,000, the


Richmond Examiner smugly reported that Union General Christopher Augur, responsible for protecting the Manassas Gap road, could not protect the trains despite his command of “20,000 men,” and was “trying in vain” to catch these partisan rangers.63

Scores of conventional cavalry expeditions were launched against these partisan rangers throughout the war, ranging in size from less than a hundred to several hundred troopers. But Mosby simply ambushed the smaller parties while dispersing his small command when confronted with larger ones. Sheridan came up with an innovative solution; using irregulars to fight irregulars. Accordingly, in August of 1864 Captain Richard Blazer, an experienced Indian fighter, was given a hundred men armed with Spencer repeating rifles and given the sole task of hunting down and destroying Mosby’s men.64 “Blazer’s Independent Scouts” proved a formidable adversary. Blazer used scouts disguised as civilians or Confederates to gather intelligence about his enemies’ location and habits.65 Recognizing the crucial advantages Mosby gained from civilian support, Blazer sought to win over the local populace. Through a practice of leniency and respect, he partially succeeded. One of Mosby’s rangers admitted that:

Capt. Blazer was not only a brave man and a hard fighter, but by his humane and kindly treatment, in striking contrast with the usual conduct of our enemies, he had so disarmed our citizens that instead of fleeing on his approach and notifying all soldiers, thus giving them a chance to

63 Unknown, “The War News the North Side.” Daily Richmond Examiner, October 27, 1864. http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=G63T56ARMTM2NjIzOTg1MC43OTAyMToxOjEzOjEzNC4xMjYuNzguODM&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=8&d_viewref=sear ch&queryname=8&d_docnum=23&d_docref=v2:118C86C5EE0B8960@EANX-11D0A8B9CC0D0D70@2402172-11D0A8B9D5DBD728@0-11D0A8B9E4729CB8@The+War+News+the+North+Side (accessed April 17, 2013).
64 Robert Mackey, The Uncivil War, 107; Sheridan to Augur, August 20, 1864. United States War Department, Official Records, (ser. 1) vol. 43, pt. 1: 860.
65 Robert Mackey, The Uncivil War, 108.
escape, but little notice was taken of him. Consequently many of our men were "gobbled up" before they were aware of his presence.  

The West Virginian counter-partisan did more than “gobble up” individual partisans. Using the very tactics that had made the irregulars so effective, the “Independent Scouts” ambushed a detachment of Mosby’s fighters in September 1864, killing or capturing two dozen partisans. Two months later he ambushed another group of irregulars. As Ranger Williamson said, “It was now evident that ‘Mosby's Men’ and ‘Blazer's Men’ could not both occupy the same section of country; one or the other must go.” On November 17, 1864, the southerners set a trap accordingly. Locating Blazer’s command in the Valley, a small group of rangers pretended to be the retreating rear guard of Mosby’s men. When the company-sized Union command gave chase, they were countercharged by two hundred mounted rangers on their flanks. Quickly routed, “Blazer’s Independent Scouts” were practically destroyed in the encounter, suffering a loss of three-quarters of their men and the capture of their leader.

Despite spectacular successes, there were serious flaws in Richmond’s approach to partisan warfare. Though the Confederate Congress had passed the Partisan Ranger Act in 1862, the army made no efforts to train or recruit suitable candidates for partisan duty from its own ranks. Instead, the initiative, like most irregular activity in the Civil War, stemmed almost entirely from the individual partisan leaders. Given this dearth of direction and active support by the central government, and the Act’s preoccupation with

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68 Robert Mackey, *The Uncivil War*, 108.
controlling guerrillas in the West, it is unsurprising that few true partisan ranger units were created.

Even as early as 1862, some southerners were complaining about irregular excesses in Virginia. General Henry Heth wrote to Governor John Letcher that rangers were “organized bands of robbers and plunderers…notorious thieves and murderers, more ready to plunder friends than foes.”71 In August 1863, citizens of Winchester substantiated this when they petitioned Richmond to remove Gilmor’s command from the area due to their looting.72 Similarly disgusted with the opportunistic transgressions of these fighters, Confederate Brigadier General Thomas Rosser wrote to General Lee that:

Without discipline, order or organization, they roam broadcast over the country, a band of thieves, stealing, pillaging, plundering and doing every manner of mischief and crime. They are a terror to the citizens and an injury to the cause. They never fight; can't be made to fight. Their leaders are generally brave, but few of the men are good soldiers and have engaged in this business for the sake of gain.73

The problems extended beyond Virginia though. Nominally partisan groups, or marauders claiming their authority, imposed hardship on citizens throughout the South. In Louisiana, irregulars under Captain James McWaters ignored local authorities and persecuted those of suspect loyalties to such a degree that it drove many into the Unionist camp.74 In Mississippi, William Falkner’s gang of misfits extended their pillaging to loyal Confederates.75 Meanwhile, in Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky, outrages committed

71 Heth to Letcher, April 2, 1862. United States War Department, Official Records, (Ser. 1) vol. 51: 526.
75 Daniel Sutherland, A Savage Conflict, 172.
by bushwhackers claiming to be partisans in Confederate service further blurred legal distinctions and undermined popular support.\footnote{Daniel Sutherland, “The Real War in Arkansas,” \textit{The Arkansas Historical Quarterly} 52, no. 3 (Autumn, 1993): 274; Sutherland, ed. \textit{Guerrillas, Unionists, and Violence}, 123.} In contrast to the residents of Mosby’s Confederacy, citizens of Pasquotank North Carolina decided that the resident partisans could offer no protection against the invaders, but rather encouraged depredations. In late 1863, 503 citizens of the town petitioned the state capital for their removal.\footnote{“Petition of 503 Citizens of Pasquotank to the Governor and Legislature of North Carolina,” December 19, 1863. \textit{Official Records}. (Ser. 1: vol. 29, pt. 2: 597-8.)} This dissatisfaction had become all too common by 1863. Even so, there remained some genuine, effective, partisan rangers; men who held authorized commissions, wore uniforms, and followed “the rules of war,” such as Col. Adam Johnson in Kentucky. Nevertheless, because of indiscipline, partisan warfare had become associated in military (and some civilian) minds with mere bushwhacking.\footnote{James B. Martin, “Black Flag Over the Bluegrass; Guerrilla Warfare in Kentucky, 1863-1865,” \textit{The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society} 86, no. 4 (1988): 352-66.}

To a high command inherently wary of irregular warfare anyway, such crimes seemed to confirm their reservations. Secretary of War James Seddon acted accordingly, recommending as early as January 1863 that partisan corps be abolished:

\begin{quote}
The policy of organizing corps of partisan rangers has not been approved by experience. The permanency of their engagements and their consequent inability to disband and reassemble at call precludes their usefulness as mere guerillas, while the comparative independence of their military relations and the peculiar rewards allowed them for captures induce much license and many irregularities. They have not infrequently incited more odium and done more damage with friends than enemies. The men composing them would be more useful in the regular organizations.\footnote{Seddon to Davis, January 3, 1863. United States, \textit{Official Records}. Ser. 4, 2, 289.}
\end{quote}

Seddon’s writings embodied a typical West Point view of irregulars: the partisans, he believed, were a compromise between conventional forces and unorganized guerrillas,
possessed of none of their strengths and all their weaknesses. Rather than representing a failure in proper implementation or oversight, Seddon blamed inherent weaknesses within the form of war itself for its failure.

Perhaps most damning to the partisan cause were the conclusions of the South’s favorite hero, Robert E. Lee. The most influential man in the Confederacy, Lee wrote to Richmond in March of 1864 that the problem was “it is almost impossible…to have discipline in these bands of partisan rangers. . . . The system gives license to many deserters and marauders, who assume to belong to these authorized companies and commit depredations on friend and foe alike.” Lee therefore recommended that all partisan rangers in the department, with the exception of Mosby, be disbanded and mustered into the regular service.

It was these statements by Lee that Confederate congressmen cited when they advocated the repeal of the Partisan Ranger Act. While many who opposed the Act admitted partisan rangers had proved effective in Virginia, Tennessee, and North Mississippi, it had elsewhere hindered, they claimed, enforcement of the conscription laws, and proved a harbor for lukewarm recruits. Louis Sparrow of Louisiana argued that at a time when many Confederate regiments could only muster “a hundred fifty men,” the South could not afford to spare these men scattered about the country. Despite this

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81 Unknown, “Legislative Proceedings,” *The Richmond Whig*. February 16, 1864. [http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/HistArchive?d_viewref=doc&p_docnum=-1&p_nbid=P5DQ5EBSTM4NDEyMjQzMy1NzQ5NzczMToxMzQuMTI2Ljcw&f_docref=v2:11AF27CD20F95E5F@EANX-139A82C87A7823C0@2401918-139A32E3875FC970@0&toc=true&p_docref=v2:11AF27CD20F95E5F@EANX-139A82C87A7823C0@2401918-139A32E388179FF0@1-13A62E0C871E0C2B@No%20Headline](http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/HistArchive?d_viewref=doc&p_docnum=-1&p_nbid=P5DQ5EBSTM4NDEyMjQzMy1NzQ5NzczMToxMzQuMTI2Ljcw&f_docref=v2:11AF27CD20F95E5F@EANX-139A82C87A7823C0@2401918-139A32E3875FC970@0&toc=true&p_docref=v2:11AF27CD20F95E5F@EANX-139A82C87A7823C0@2401918-139A32E388179FF0@1-13A62E0C871E0C2B@No%20Headline) (accessed November 10, 1864).
opposition, some senators believed that partisan rangers provided the surest defense of their states. Mr. Phelan of Mississippi claimed that in some locales, including his own, “the defense of the country had depended upon these bands almost entirely.” The senator from Kentucky agreed, positing that in the mountainous terrain of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, “no troops could be compared for efficiency to the partisan rangers.” Mr. Clark of Missouri said that partisan rangers were the only Confederate soldiers in his state, and that the law’s repeal would deny the Confederacy the services of thousands of Missourians. By 1864, these states had been denied the benefit of conventional Confederate protection. Irregular warfare was the only available option and, despite the legislation’s shortcomings, at least some partisan rangers had proven effective enough to encourage these politicians of their worth. Nevertheless, most southern officials disagreed, and on February 17, 1864, the Partisan Ranger Act had been repealed, with only John McNeill and Mosby’s units exempted.

All active measures to defeat Mosby and McNeill had failed, and passive efforts such as fortifications could only mitigate, rather than defeat, the Virginia irregulars. For over two years, the irregular troopers had effectively kept the initiative against the numerous Federal forces arrayed against them. It therefore must have been with frustration that Mosby and McNeill greeted the news of Lee’s surrender on April 9, 1865. Although he considered continued resistance, Captain Jessie McNeill eventually decided to submit a month later. At first, Mosby refused to capitulate. His was an independent

83 J.A.S. to Adj. Gen., April 21, 1864. United States War Department, Official Records, (ser. 1) vol. 33:1,253.; “Proceedings of the First Confederate Congress: Fourth Session, 7 December 1863-18 February 1864,” Southern Historical Society Papers, 50 (new ser., 12) (October 1953), 401. There were also partisan units in the Trans-Mississippi Department and the West that continued to operate, some unofficially.
command, and as long as there was a Confederate army in the field somewhere, the war would continue. Upon learning of General Joseph E. Johnston’s surrender later that month, however, Mosby recognized the futility of further resistance. Calling together his Confederate troopers one last time, Mosby disbanded the unit and personally surrendered on June 17.

Partisan warfare had shown itself capable of great feats when performed by active and skilled practitioners. When the results are examined in light of the principles of diversion, logistical destruction, and erosion of psychological and material resources, it should be remembered that the great majority of these achievements were accomplished by just a few hundred men.

Measured in terms of the numbers of soldiers diverted to the rear that could have been employed elsewhere, the partisans’ diversion strategy was undoubtedly effective. Besides detachments sent to the rear in reaction to specific incidents (Sigel’s Valley campaign, Sheridan after the wagon raid, and Sheridan’s inability to reinforce Grant due to Mosby’s activity) thousands of troops were re-routed to guard static possessions. 25,000 men were diverted to protect the B. & O. railroad alone during the war, and thousands more to guard other railroads, bridges, and towns.84 The actions of McNeill and Mosby deserve the great share of credit for these circumstances. Though it is tempting to dismiss this dispersion of men as inconsequential in view of the Union’s ultimate victory, it is logical to assume that their absence had a great affect on the

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planning and execution of campaigns, and therefore that their presence might have shortened the war.

Logistically, the partisans had shown themselves capable of great destruction, be it of railways or wagons. Such operations must be put into perspective though. While disruptive, these activities in and of themselves did not have the ability to derail any serious offensives, the way several cavalry raids did in the West. Partisan rangers, with their small numbers and lack of artillery, could not achieve the level of destruction necessary to immobilize the flow of supplies to an entire army. This was not an absolute law; had there been several partisan ranger units of Mosby’s quality that dedicated themselves to cutting Sheridan’s supply lines, they probably could have done so. The fact remains though that the burden of Confederate partisan warfare rested primarily on the successes of just two irregular groups.

The strategy that partisan fighters most excelled at was erosion. Under John McNeill, the rangers of western Virginia achieved a capture ratio of “forty prisoners for every man on the Ranger roster.” Mosby rivaled these figures; a northern correspondent told his paper that during the month of October 1864, Mosby “killed or captured 69 Yankees, for every man he lost.” If one considers the countless horses, supplies, and munitions captured, as well as the extremely low partisan casualty rates in comparison to

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86 Unknown, “General Custer’s Visit to Newark.” Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, October 29, 1864. http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=L68E5ADVMTM2NjMwMDczNi42NzQzODE6MToxMzoxMzQuMTI2Lj4Ljc1&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=4&d_viewref=search&p_queryscale=4&p_docnum=1&p_docref=v2:123D88C6895AE516@EANX-126324F5B26C670@2402172-1263249FB00EB048@2-126324A19150D4B0@General+Custar%27s+Visit+to+Newark (accessed April 18, 2013).
the many Union men killed or wounded in each engagement, and it becomes clear that
the Confederacy quantifiably received a very favorable investment for the few men
(many ineligible for the regular army anyway) it risked pursuing these prizes. Beyond the
physical realm however, the South benefitted immensely from the moral dimensions of
partisan operations.

Partisan activity extracted a very real political cost from Washington in the form
of negative publicity, criticism, and lowered troop morale. The will of both soldier and
citizen was thus damaged by the “Grey Ghost” and his companions. The South
conversely was supplied with a new national hero, a figure that defied the odds and all
efforts to stop him. Mosby’s small skirmishes with a couple hundred men made front
page news in papers across the country. Even as its conventional forces were being
defeated outside Atlanta, Nashville, and Richmond, partisan rangers continued to deliver
noticeable victories against great odds. This resistance helped bolster the people’s
resolve to continue the struggle through the distressing months of 1864 and early 1865.

Lee’s description of unrestrained “deserters and marauders” suggests that many
so-called partisans were in fact operating as mere guerrillas or outlaws, rather than the
disciplined enlisted soldiers that Leiber described and Mosby resembled. Mosby, who
had according to Lee performed “excellent service” and was “strict in discipline and a
protection to the country in which he operate[d],” was allowed to continue because he
was a partisan ranger in actuality, and not merely in name.87 The failure of the act does
not then reflect upon the efficacy of partisan warfare but rather on the Confederacy’s lack

87 Lee to Inspector Gen. Cooper, April 1, 1864. United States War Department, *Official Records*, (ser. 1)
vol. 33:1,252.
of oversight, likely stemming from the misguided view that partisan warfare should be a self-regulating and peripheral effort. Ironically, the proximity to both capitals, and the accompanying national focus this brought, probably provided the attention and oversight necessary to McNeill and Mosby that was generally lacking in the Confederacy’s irregular warfare policies. Regardless, by underestimating and underutilizing partisan warfare, the Confederacy neglected a potent irregular weapon that, in proportion to the resources committed, may have exacted a higher cost from the Union than any other form of irregular warfare in the war.
Chapter Three: Guerrillas

“The Ultimate results of the guerrilla system of warfare is the total destruction of all private rights in the country occupied by such parties.”

- General Philip Sheridan, U.S.A.

When most imagine the Civil War, they picture uniformed soldiers, marching in formation, standing in ranks to oppose similarly arrayed adversaries. While this conventional image was often the case, it masks another war; a brutal war of ambush, murder, rapine, and occupation. From the beginning of the war, through to its last days, thousands of southern civilians chose to make war on their own terms. Rather than join the conventional armies, these men instead became guerrillas, waging what was often a personal war against the Yankee occupation. This mode of war, though observable almost anywhere the Federals occupied, was especially prevalent in the Trans-Mississippi Theatre, in the states of Arkansas and Missouri. For these states, guerrilla warfare, not conventional battles, would be the defining wartime experience of both combatants and non-combatants. Though initially successful, a combination of Union adaptation and

1 51st Congress, 2nd Session, House Miscellaneous Document # 17, Court of Claims, “E.J. Conard et. Al. v. United States.”
http://books.google.com/books?id=s583AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA193&lpg=PA193&dq=general+sheridan+%28the+ultimate+result+of+the+guerrilla+system+of+warfare&source=bl&ots=PNk0JV0TRY&sig=tjo1HIxNdygoF2OnBwspRZ7-lA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=aB0sUeqwMY-80QGUx0CYDA&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=general%20sheridan%20the%20ultimate%20result%20of%20guerrilla%20system%20of%20warfare&f=false (accessed February 25, 2013).
internal deficits in discipline and coordination ultimately doomed the guerrilla war effort.²

During the war, guerrilla warfare went through two stages. The first phase lasted from 1861 through roughly 1863, and was characterized by ideologically motivated, pro-secessionist guerrillas who focused their attacks on Unionists and Federal soldiers. The second stage, emerging in 1863 and becoming dominant by 1864, was the transformation of the guerrilla war from one of ideology to one characterized by indiscriminant predatory opportunism. The transformation was probably inevitable due to the nature of the war. Dispersed over thousands of miles, these Rebels who had taken up arms for local concerns could not be organized into a unified command capable of broad cooperation and discipline, be it with conventional Confederate forces or other guerrillas. As these realities became increasingly apparent, the Union was confronted with a region that more closely resembled a failed state than an enemy-controlled territory. Though the guerrilla war was the most widespread form of irregular warfare in the Civil War, it alone had proven itself impotent by the end of the war by the standards of irregular success.

Guerrillas were a specific type of unconventional combatant, distinct from their also-irregular brothers, the partisan rangers and cavalry raiders. Whereas the latter two

categories were composed of men enlisted in the regular army, and therefore subject to its regulations and orders, guerrillas operated independently of the Confederate chain of command. Technically then, guerrillas were not soldiers; they were civilians fighting against the occupying Federals. When asked by Union authorities to delineate the various kinds of irregulars and their legality, renowned legal professor Francis Lieber described guerrillas as “self-constituted sets of armed men in times of war, who form no integrant part of the organized army, do not stand on the regular pay-roll of the army, or are not paid at all, take up arms and lay them down at intervals, and carry on petty war chiefly by raids, extortion, destruction, and murder.”

Though Lieber wrote his essay half-way through the war, his definitions coincided with the general consensus among military thinkers of his era.

It was this lack of supervision and accountability, the absence of a uniform, and a propensity for atrocity that made guerrillas illegal and so reviled by the conventional soldiers in northern, and even southern, ranks. Without a uniform, the guerrillas could disguise themselves as civilians to hide from their enemies, as well as pass through enemy lines without suspicion. Such practices undermined the distinction between combatant and non-combatant, and by doing so loosed the bonds of restraint between occupier and occupied.

A hierarchal, slave-holding society like the South favored order, a sentiment mirrored by the professionally trained military men that directed the Union and

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Confederate war efforts. These commanders were uncomfortable enough allowing limited numbers of enlisted men to act with comparative freedom as partisan rangers or cavalry raiders. Believing that their sparse manpower must be concentrated, and fearing the anarchy of unrestrained bands of fighters, the Confederate high command refused to actively pursue a policy of guerrilla warfare. The eventual degeneration of the bushwhackers into brigands seemed to confirm these fears.4 The guerrilla war arose, then, not out of a conscious effort of the government in Richmond (though it received the tacit support of some local officials), but rather organically and spontaneously from the inhabitants of the occupied areas themselves, areas that had been effectively abandoned by the Confederacy due to conventional military defeats early in the war.

The men who became guerrillas represented the full spectrum of southern white Antebellum society. Some were affluent professionals or slave owners; others were independent yeomen or poor whites. They ranged in age from teenagers to those too old for active service, with a stiff leavening of military-aged men, often deserters from the regular army.5 As the Confederacy rarely occupied extensive pro-Union areas (with the exception of east Tennessee), no Unionist guerrilla movement of equitable scale emerged, though there were “Jayhawkers” in Kansas, east Tennessee, and Kentucky, and numerous “bummers,” stragglers, and marauders that traveled in the wake of Union armies and contributed to the misery of the occupied South.

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4 The term “bushwhacker” was a common epithet for guerrillas during the war, used by regulars and the press on both sides. As a label it carried negative connotations of criminality and cowardice, not strong ideological resolve. Though some historians have differentiated between loyal Confederate-supporting guerrillas and unsavory bandit “bushwhackers,” the author has chosen to use the term in this thesis as a synonym for “guerrilla,” in part because it was so used at the time, but also because, as will be seen, the former gradually became the latter.

5 Stephan Ash, When the Yankees Came, 49.
Motives for joining a guerrilla unit were just as varied as their socio-economic origins. For many, local defense was a priority. Reluctant to leave their crops and families unattended, these men preferred to serve their community rather than travel far away for months on end. Others chaffed at the regulations and orders of the regular army, preferring their independence instead. As one deserter-turned-guerrilla explained, “That kind of warfare did not suit me. I wanted to get out where I could have it more lively; where I could fight if I wanted to, or run if I so desired; I wanted to be my own general.”

Revenge proved another potent recruitment tool for guerrillas. Often people wished to settle personal vendettas against Unionist neighbors, either for pre-war grievances or more recent abuses after the Yankees came. Such feuds encouraged the degeneration of many guerrilla bands into brigands as the war progressed. Others directed their hate towards the Federal soldiers themselves. Though a Confederate regular, General Theophilus Holmes embodied the attitude of many guerrillas when he eloquently informed a Union counterpart that “We hate you with a cordial hatred. You may conquer us and parcel out our lands among your soldiers, but you must remember that one incident of history, to wit, that of all the Russians who settled in Poland not one died a natural death.” Clearly Union occupation would be contested by such a stubborn populace. Jack Hinson began the war as a neutral civilian, until both of his sons were

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6 Daniel Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict*, 43.
executed for guerrilla activity. Subsequently, Hinson became a guerrilla himself, and would eventually kill thirty-six Union soldiers and sailors in retaliation.\textsuperscript{10} No one exemplified hatred as much as Champ Ferguson, a notorious guerrilla who when captured and tried at the end of the war was charged with fifty-three murders. Some reports claimed that his wife and daughter had been raped by Union troops. Regardless of the reason, Ferguson did seem to differentiate between his enemies: “I havn’t got no feeling agin [sic] these Yankee soldiers except that they are wrong, and oughtn’t to come down here and fight our people. I won’t tech [sic] them; but when I catches any one of them hounds I’ve got good cause to kill, I’m goin’ to kill em.”\textsuperscript{11} Whatever the reason, a high degree of motivation and passion was required to begin and sustain a guerrilla war, and this was a commodity many southerners possessed throughout the war.

The crucial distinction between guerrillas and other southerners fighting against the Union was one of identity. Whereas partisans and cavalry raiders (and many civilians throughout the South) had displayed an awareness of a greater shared identity through their concern for faraway regions and people of the Confederacy, and their generous support for, and coordination with, the government’s general war effort, guerrillas had explicitly rejected this Confederate nationalism in favor of private and local loyalties. While other irregulars and conventional soldiers certainly shared these local concerns, they nevertheless believed that devotion to the Confederacy was the best means of protecting their families and private interests. Guerrillas, while undoubtedly pro-secession and anti-Union, could not therefore be characterized as “Confederate,” because

\textsuperscript{10} Daniel Sutherland, \textit{A Savage Conflict}, 153.
their existence was due in fact to a rejection of a broader national identity, displayed in their lack of coordination and refusal to serve in other areas. Even during the first two years of war, when guerrilla violence was much less indiscriminate than in would later become, guerrillas, while damaging to Union efforts, had shown themselves unwilling to be governed by Confederate authorities.

At first glance, Missouri’s guerrilla war seemed to defy demographic patterns. Contrary to what might be expected, in Missouri the frequency of guerrilla activity did not necessarily correlate with the presence of slavery. Guerrilla warfare was waged across the breadth of the state; only the North-West escaped frequent violence. While several counties with high slave populations, such as Jackson, Lafayette, or Saline counties, did host many bushwhackers, so too did Jasper and Newton counties to the South, each of whose population was less than five percent slave.12 Nor was the relative size or distribution of the local populace a factor; the most violent counties varied greatly in their population density.13

The political data from the 1860 gubernatorial and presidential elections offer more insight. Overwhelmingly, Missourians were wary of the new Republican Party, whose limited support was mainly found among the abolitionist German immigrants of St. Louis. Instead, a pro-South Democrat, Claiborne Jackson, was elected, with a Constitutional Union candidate coming in second place. The Republicans finished fourth,
with nearly half the votes of the third place Southern Democrats.\textsuperscript{14} The presidential election mirrored this trend, with the state narrowly favoring the Democrat Stephen Douglas over the Constitutional Unionists, and Abraham Lincoln garnering only ten percent of the popular vote.\textsuperscript{15}

Eighty percent of the most violent counties were, however, within fifty miles of the Kansas border.\textsuperscript{16} The bloody pre-war tit-for-tat killings between radicals in both states no doubt contributed to the motivation of revenge. The actions of both the Federal and Confederate governments inadvertently encouraged the commencement of guerrilla warfare as well, the latter by withdrawing, and the former by alienating the population, as shall be seen. The depth of this alienation is demonstrated in that many of the most guerrilla-infested counties had voted for the centrist Constitutional Union Party in 1860.\textsuperscript{17}

As previously mentioned, guerrilla forces were active throughout most of the state. Though the Ozarks penetrated deep in the state, offering rugged mountain safe-havens for daring bushwhackers to retreat into, it was the Osage Plains on the eastern border of the state that saw the most violence. The plains were crisscrossed with numerous rivers and tributaries (such as the Missouri, Blackwater, and South Grande rivers) that served both as barriers to pursuing forces and sources of water-borne prey. More importantly, the Osage Plains abutted the hated Kansans to the east, perhaps giving

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the natives more incentive to wage a personal war. When not hiding amongst the general population, bushwhackers could disperse in the numerous ravines, river beds, swamps, and woods that the terrain offered.  

Irregulars in Arkansas took advantage of the relative underdeveloped character of their state to oppose Union occupation. The Ozark Mountains in the north, and the forests and swamps found throughout the eastern border and northern regions of the area hindered effective pursuit from mounted Yankee cavalry. Guerrillas here also enjoyed greater ideological support from non-combatants than the irregulars in divided Missouri, though there were significant communities of Unionists in the northern part of the state. As in Missouri, a strong politically moderate element had shown itself in the 1860 presidential election.  

Despite this, Arkansas was much less politically divided during the war than its northern neighbor. The Southern Democratic candidate received over half the vote, and Lincoln was not even on the ballot. Proportionately, Arkansas had more slaves than Tennessee, and more than twice the percentage of Missouri. Like the civilian Rebels to the north, the irregular war did not, however, limit itself to the area with the most slave owners (the southeast). The northern part of the state, home as it was to both occupying Federals and “galvanized Yankees,” drew much violent attention. When President

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18 Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War*, 2, 163.  
Lincoln called for troops to put down the rebellion on April 15, Arkansas moved quickly to secede on May 6, before Tennessee or North Carolina.

For the Union, Missouri, with its large population and industry, was essential to control. If southern forces, conventional or irregular, gained supremacy, the surrounding Union states of Kansas, Iowa, or Illinois could be threatened, and the Indian Territory decisively lost. Equally important from a political and military standpoint was the protection of the state’s own large Unionist population. In Arkansas similar sentiments prevailed, with the added impetus that here especially greater Federal plans for the Deep South could unravel due to the threat to Union Mississippi River traffic. The Mississippi River offered an irreplaceable avenue of invasion and supply for Union forces attempting to conquer the Trans-Mississippi; therefore the Union must secure its banks.

Guerrilla warfare in Missouri began in earnest in the first year of war, 1861. Even before “The War Between the States” had officially commenced, Missouri had been a veritable powder-keg of southern and Union sympathizers, and there had been incidents of violence between radical Kansas abolitionists (called Jayhawkers) and their pro-slavery Missouri counterparts. In February 1861, the state faced a daunting choice; should they secede or remain in the Union? Strong cultural attachments (three-quarters of the population was southern) were counteracted by equally strong economic links with the North, thoroughly dividing the population.\textsuperscript{23} Governor Cleburne Jackson, though himself a secessionist, attempted to pursue a neutral course, at least publically like his neighbor Kentucky.

\textsuperscript{23} Michael Fellman, \textit{Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War}, 5-7.
Tensions escalated, however when, on May 11, a body of state militia was surrounded and arrested by Federal troops commanded by General Nathaniel Lyon, who feared the pro-southern state militia planned to seize the arsenal in St. Louis. This aggressive and heavy-handed action converted many moderate Unionists into secessionists. A mob attacked Federal soldiers in St. Louis, and the state-militia was expanded. Reacting to these hostile gestures, Lyon in turn further antagonized Missourians when he told Governor Jackson, “Better, sir, far better that the blood of every man, woman, and child within the limits of the State should flow, than that she should defy the federal government. This means war.”

Many Missourians took the general at his word, and violence erupted throughout the state. Though speaking about the war in general, one man’s declaration described the situation in Missouri perfectly; “This revolution is not the work of leaders or politicians. It is the spontaneous uprising and upheaving of the people. It is irresistible as the mighty tide of the ocean.” The Confederate leadership had not called for this guerrilla warfare. Though some Missourian secessionist leaders undoubtedly welcomed it, they still hoped to seize the state outright by conventional means. Governor Jackson, now overtly secessionist, was gathering an army of militia to this end. There were nonetheless those in the Confederate media who advocated the former course. That summer, the Macon (Georgia) Telegraph declared, “Every farmer get his weapon ready for most terrible

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24 Christopher Phillips, Missouri’s Confederate: Claiborne Fox Jackson and the Creation of Southern Identity in the Border West (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 251-61, quoted in Daniel Sutherland, A Savage Conflict, 14.
guerrilla warfare which a brave people ever carried on in defense of their wives and children, and their sacred liberties.”

Lyon was correct; the war had indeed begun.

The guerrillas used a variety of tactics to contest the Union’s control of their state. One of the most effective was the use of intimidation and violence against Unionist civilians. In keeping with their concept of local defense, guerrillas considered Unionists a threat to their community. Across the region, many of the latter persuasion had their homes burned, their property looted, and their male family members murdered. By undermining the morale and political will of pro-Union citizens, guerrillas sought to assert secessionist (as they saw it) control over areas nominally held by the North. The anarchy and violence eventually became so severe in the state that one third of the population chose to leave its borders during the war. Ultimately, the insurrection would cost the lives of twenty seven thousand Missourians of all political affiliations.

Guerrillas did not limit their attacks to non-combatants. Like irregular fighters throughout the ages, the southern “bushwhackers” compensated for their battlefield inferiority by concentrating their efforts on where the enemy was weakest. Often, this meant the Union’s logistical lines, whereby they obtained supplies, and their communications. Wagon trains, couriers, foraging detachments, patrols, small garrisons, telegraph lines, and trains and their tracks were all threatened by sabotage or ambush

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28 Mark Geiger, “Indebtedness and the Origins of Guerrilla Violence in Civil War Missouri,” Journal of Southern History: 1. This figure does not include the tens of thousands of Missourians who fought in the conventional armies of both sides during the war, or Union soldiers killed by guerrillas in the state.
from the citizen warriors. A northern newspaper described one such attack on a common target; “The train, containing troops, was suddenly fired upon from ambuscades along the line of the road. . . . Before the soldiers could get out, the rebels had dispersed.”

The elusiveness of their foe, a universal feature of guerrillas, was similarly noted by a Yankee officer: “It is impossible for any body of troops to march on them without their being apprised of it, and it is impossible to force them to fight unless they want to, for they carry little or no baggage, and can live on little or nothing. When approached they disintegrate and hide … until all danger is over, when they again reassemble for fresh deprivations.” Forced to defend fixed positions, the Union left the initiative in the hands of the guerrillas, despite outnumbering them almost ten to one. Until Union commanders could develop ways to combat guerrilla warfare, their control of Missouri would be in name only.

Guerrillas also benefited, at least initially, from the active support of some of the citizenry. As the Union officer quoted above observed, living off the countryside kept the Rebel fighters mobile. Another “blue belly” (as the Union soldiers were sometimes called by their adversaries), though writing later in the war, described a further advantage the guerrillas possessed; information from the civilians. The bushwhackers, he said, were “the friends and relatives of the people, and are kept informed of all that goes on in the

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neighborhood. . . .None of the natives can be trusted as a rule.” This support provided the “Seccesh” (slang for secessionist) with valuable intelligence against the invaders. Crucially, it also enabled the Rebel citizens to hide among the general populace, frustrating Union efforts to bring their adversaries to battle. This further embittered the Federals against the population of the state.

Guerrilla acts of ambush, assassination, intimidation and sabotage threatened, in time, to leave the main forces of the enemy isolated, starving, and blind. Unable to effectively control the countryside, unsure of where the shadow fighters were located, and constantly losing soldiers to ambush, the Union risked a prolonged conflict without visible military or political gains. Over time, the occupying armies would, the irregulars hoped, lose the political will to pay such a high cost in money and lives, and leave the state. Although the war in Missouri had only raged for three months, Union commanders were well aware of their precarious control of the state.

The Union cause in Missouri took another blow when their forces were defeated on August 10, 1861, at the battle of Wilson’s Creek, by the conventional Confederate and state-militia forces under General Ben McCulloch. During the battle, the provocative General Lyon was killed. In the short-term, the battle could not but have galvanized the guerrilla activity in the state. Hence-forward though, the bushwhackers in Missouri faced Union commanders who took the irregular threat seriously.

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General John Pope, Union commander of northern Missouri, had in reaction to guerrillas initiated retaliatory measures against the population that foreshadowed the “hard war” doctrine practiced throughout the occupied South later in the war. Pope initiated a policy whereby the citizens would pay a levy of money or property for any acts of sabotage or violence within a five-mile radius.\(^3\) Lyon’s replacement as commander of all of Missouri, John C. Fremont, would prove equally aggressive. Fremont declared martial law, and proclaimed that all civilians found guilty of taking up arms against the Union would be executed.\(^4\) By the time General Henry Halleck took command in December, the destruction of bridges, telegraph lines, and railroads had become so severe that Halleck declared anyone caught in the act of sabotage would be shot.\(^5\) Unionists, encouraged by such policies, took action too. The *New York Times* reported just how far these social tensions had escalated:

> The secessionists have, for some time past, been very unruly. . . . Accordingly, the secessionists, who had just been indulging in getting up a private reign of terror in the town of Maryville…were quietly surrounded, and the whole gang, about seventy of them, taken prisoners. Twenty of them took the oath of allegiance to Abraham, and the rest were trotted out to be hung, as they did not wish to for-swear Lucifer Jackson, for all the enjoyments of the lap of Abraham or any other man.\(^6\)

Luckily for these men, compassionate soldiers from Iowa interceded on their behalf. Still, the incident communicates how volatile the military and civil situation was in Missouri at this time. Unable to effectively combat the bushwhackers directly due to their mobility and civilian support, the North had attempted to dissuade real and potential

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4\(^4\) John Fremont, “Proclamation, Headquarters Western Department, St. Louis United States War Department,” August 30, 1861. *Official Records*, (ser. 1) vol.3: 466-7.


irregulars by severe penalties and retaliatory measures against the citizenry. These measures had done little to slow the insurrection. Although the White House claimed Missouri had not seceded, in fact it was a battleground as real as Virginia. 1861 had seen guerrilla warfare commence with the outbreak of the conventional war between North and South. Strategically, pro-southern guerrilla warfare had in large part contributed to keeping Federal control of Missouri haphazard. 1862 would see this guerrilla war escalate and expand beyond the confines of Missouri, into Arkansas, another region whose wartime experience was defined by guerrilla warfare.

Although the Federals experienced difficulties combating irregulars, they enjoyed more success in the conventional contest between armies. In early March 1862, the Union army under General Samuel Curtis won a decisive victory against the Confederate army at the battle of Pea Ridge, just over the border in Arkansas. The clash had serious repercussions for how the war would be conducted in the far west henceforward. With the defeat, the Confederate military presence in the region had all but been destroyed, and most of what was left of the Confederate army was withdrawn from the area to join the Army of Tennessee further east. Regular Confederate forces could now no longer properly defend Arkansas, let alone threaten Missouri. 37

With little organized opposition, Curtis turned his incursion into an attempt to conquer the rest of the state. Arkansans, receiving little aid from the Confederacy, embraced guerrilla warfare as the only viable option to defend their state. Although Missouri guerrillas would continue to harass Union forces throughout the second year of war, the strategic center of the guerrilla war had shifted south, as the citizen Rebels

37 Daniel Sutherland, A Savage Conflict, 65.
attempted to counter the northern invasion. These southerners were aided by Missouri guerrillas and former soldiers of the retreating Confederate army. One Confederate officer noted an episode that occurred in numerous places in the Upper South in 1862:

> Our men dropped out by hundreds and by thousands and remained behind. . . . They were unwilling to again leave all that was dear to them to horrors worse than war. . . . To meet and match the Federal Home Guards, and the marauding robber bands that belonged to neither side or army . . . they formed themselves into guerrilla bands to enable them to act more effectively. 38

Such a happening again demonstrated the local priorities of many guerrillas. It also, however, reveals circumstances that would grow steadily more significant as time passed; the presence of roaming bands of guerrilla-thieves that targeted citizens of both sides indiscriminately. Such activities would gradually undermine the whole guerrilla effort.

The men left fighting the Yankees were far removed from the influence of the Confederate government, and no longer subject to its discipline.

General Curtis began his advance towards Little Rock, the capital of Arkansas, in late spring of 1862. Unfortunately for the Union army, the Yankees soon found themselves hemmed in on all sides by swarms of “wandering marauders” and “railraiders.” Using the terrain to their advantage, bushwhackers conducted ambushes and raids in the mountains, forests, and river banks of northern Arkansas. 39 The psychological effect of this kind of war was burdensome, and undermined morale; Union soldiers were never sure when the next attack would come, or even who the enemy was. Samuel Trescott, a Union cavalryman, confided to his family that “We think out here we would

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rather be in a big fight than be shot at when we are going down the road.” Another soldier echoed this sentiment when he wrote that he’d “rather be killed in battle than be shot from behind a tree by…marauding bands of desperadoes.” With such experiences, the soldiers felt little compunction about living off the land during this “White River Expedition”; a course of action necessary regardless, because the guerrillas had in fact successfully cut the army’s supply lines between Arkansas and Missouri, their base.

In an effort to control the guerrilla war already in progress, Confederate General Thomas Hindman, under whose jurisdiction Arkansas fell, issued his “General Orders 17” in mid-June. These decrees attempted to direct and exploit the guerrilla war by essentially turning the guerrilla civilians into enlisted partisans. Partisan rangers, while using tactics reminiscent of guerrillas, were disciplined, uniformed soldiers who were controlled by the Confederate Army and followed the established rules of war. Hindman asked the men of Arkansas to organize themselves into companies that would be “governed in all respects by the same regulations as other troops. Captains [would] be held responsible for the good conduct and efficiency of their men, and [would] report to [his] headquarters.” The Confederate Congress replicated this approach on a national scale by passing the “Partisan Ranger Act” a month later. Although the latter act did produce some skilled partisan units, most of these rangers had been conventional Confederate soldiers before joining. Few actual guerrillas paid heed to Hindman or Congress, preferring instead to follow their own orders and interests. That was, after all,

40 Samuel Trescott to Cousin, May 1, 1862, Trescott Correspondence, S.S. Marrett to Wife, May 31, 1862, quoted in Daniel Sutherland, A Savage Conflict, 66.
why they had become guerrillas in the first place. Despite the Confederate military’s ambivalence about guerrilla warfare, some in the media still advocated it. The Columbus Georgia *Daily Constitutionalist* asserted “We must enter upon this and every other species of warfare to exterminate the foul invaders of our soil.”

Union General Curtis, meanwhile, dissuaded by rampant “desperadoes” activity (yet another epithet for guerrillas), was forced to divert his expedition to Helena. As previously mentioned, the Federals, due to their supply situation, were forced to subsist off the local population. Purposely targeting “Seccesh” civilians for the worst deprivations, Curtis wrote proudly, “I leave nothing for man or brute in the country passed over by my army, except a little to feed the poor.” Although armies had looted and foraged before, Curtis’s Army of the Southwest was the first to practice a policy of deliberately living off the southern populace in order to damage the latter’s will and resources, and the event was itself directly brought on by the guerrilla war. This would become a standard feature of Union policy later in the war. The Arkansas insurrection thus had affected two strategic effects; first, it had deflected a Union advance, thereby limiting the North’s control to the northern part of the state. Secondly, it had explicitly foreshadowed the Union high command’s decision to conduct “hard war;” that is, to directly target the southern people’s morale and property, rather than just their armies.

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43 Unknown, “Night Attacks,” *Daily Constitutionalist*, April 6, 1862. [http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbib=54e3f4c4e0b2b9607376f0f705d2b37f&p_docnum=1&p_docref=v2:1395DC574E208F55@EANX-13B9DEA5D9FBE6B8@2401237-13B783136A076640@1-13BFCC7F03611A61@Night+Attacks](http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbib=54e3f4c4e0b2b9607376f0f705d2b37f&p_docnum=1&p_docref=v2:1395DC574E208F55@EANX-13B9DEA5D9FBE6B8@2401237-13B783136A076640@1-13BFCC7F03611A61@Night+Attacks) (accessed March 5, 2013).

To combat the bushwhacker menace, the Union developed a number of innovative counter-guerrilla devices. An added impetus to halt the “desperadoes” was the vulnerability of river traffic on the Mississippi. Guerrillas lining the banks of the river would fire into the ships as they passed, often capturing unwary boats and confiscating their cargo.\(^{45}\) The Mississippi River was the main artery of supply for any advance by Union armies into the Deep South, as well as supporting the Federal occupation of New Orleans. If Vicksburg, Mississippi was ever to be taken, the river would first have to be secured. For the North, retaliatory destruction of private property became a standard reaction whenever and wherever an attack occurred. Often, whatever town or houses stood within a few miles of the attack would be razed.\(^{46}\) In one incident that year, General William Tecumseh Sherman, who would later become the personification of “hard war,” ordered a fifteen mile swath of Arkansas to be burned in retribution for a deadly attack on a transport.\(^{47}\) By punishing civilians, Union authorities hoped that southerners would stop aiding guerrillas with information, hiding places, and supplies.

To combat the threat against its river operations, the Union developed the Mississippi Marine Brigade in November 1862; a combined-arms force specifically designed to combat guerrillas. To counter the mobility of the elusive “marauders,” the brigade’s 1,200 men were mounted on mules or horses, and were conveyed on eight specially-designed transports.\(^{48}\) Though logical on paper, the unit’s discipline problems led it to specialize more in indiscriminate burning and looting than in fighting irregulars,

\(^{45}\) Daniel Sutherland, “The Real War in Arkansas,” Arkansas Historical Quarterly: 266.
\(^{48}\) Robert Mackey, The Uncivil War, 56.
and the unit was eventually disbanded.49 Still, the creation of the unit in the first place showed that the Federal leadership considered the irregular violence important enough to merit a tailored and persistent response.

Other specifically anti-guerrilla units were more effective. Previously, Union authorities had relied on conventional cavalry patrols to find and fight guerrillas. These patrols, unfamiliar with the environment and ignorant of the local people, rarely came to grips with their more mobile foes. Beginning in 1862, Union commanders raised local regiments of Unionists to serve in their area, rather than sending these men to the front to fight against the Confederate armies. These “tories,” as Unionists were called, knew the terrain. They personally knew the people, and their loyalties. Perhaps most importantly, they were highly motivated by personal grievances and a determination to reclaim their homes for the United States.50 The First Arkansas Cavalry was one such unit. Many of the families of the men had been driven from the state by guerrillas, and now the Union men would take their revenge. Over the duration of the war, the unit killed more than two hundred guerrillas.51

The last important tool in Washington’s anti-guerrilla strategy was the provost guard. These were the soldiers charged with policing the army, supervising army-civilian contact, and maintaining, along with garrison units, order in occupied zones. The guerrilla war in Missouri had honed this organization into a potent intelligence agency, complete with a secret service branch. Spies would infiltrate guerrilla or southern-sympathizer circles, then ascertain the location of guerrilla bases or the identities of the

49 Robert Mackey, *The Uncivil War*, 57-8.
51 Robert Mackey, *The Uncivil War*, 62.
outlaws. The provost martial, commander of the policing organization, even kept
dossiers on the civilians in his area. Some typical descriptions read: “A man named
‘Hunter’ who is a rebel but not a bushwhacker,” or for another, “A Union sympathizer
[sic] who will give information.” Armed with such intelligence, Union soldiers could go
on the offensive against these “brigands.” Previously, mobility and information had been
key strengths of the Rebel citizens. Through their use of spies and Unionist southerners,
the Union was beginning to neutralize that advantage.

Even as the insurrection had reached its peak of strategic decisiveness, the Union
had developed a number of effective tactics that could mitigate, though not neutralize,
guerrilla activity. Another factor would prove even more damaging to the citizen’s
rebellion. 1862 witnessed the widespread emergence of a new kind of guerrilla, one
motivated solely by profit. These guerrillas, though they might have claimed a political
allegiance, targeted civilians regardless of their loyalties. Looting was nothing new at this
stage in the war in Arkansas and Missouri. “Bloody Bill” Anderson, an infamous
guerrilla in Missouri, confided to an acquaintance in 1861: “I don’t care any more than
you for the South…but there is a lot of money in this [guerrilla] business.” An anomaly
in 1861, and a minority in 1862, brigand-guerrillas would steadily grow in numbers and
brazenness. Amid the chaos of war, anarchy loomed.

52 Daniel Sutherland, A Savage Conflict, 124.
53 Office of the Provost Martial, “List of Bushwhackers and Guerrillas, Home Guards, Union Men, and
Persons Taking Oaths of Allegiance, Compiled 1863-64,” Department of Arkansas, vol. 361, Record Group
393, National Archives and Records, quoted in Robert Mackey, Inside War, 60.
54 William E. Connelley interview with Charles Strieby, Box 13, William E. Connelley Collection (Kansas
State Historical Society, Topeka), quoted in Mark Geiger, “Indebtedness and the Origins of Guerrilla
Some men took advantage of the absence of law and the fluctuating political control of these regions to gain financially. Rival armies stripped the countryside of food, provoking famine and rendering many guerrillas desperate for sustenance, which they often stole from local inhabitants.\textsuperscript{55} One family that suffered such abuse in 1862 was “stripped of everything but what was on their bodies,” and left in a “destitute condition.”\textsuperscript{56} Already a problem in 1862, such incidents would occur with increasing frequency as the war progressed.

Even pro-southern citizens began to turn against the bushwhackers. One town declared: “We who voted for the ordinance of secession doubly desire to express our disapproval of Southern guerrillas. . . . We will neither aid, abet nor harbor them nor their unholy actions.”\textsuperscript{57} By preying on civilians, these brigand-guerrillas undermined one of the crucial supporting structures of their method of war. Without civilian support, the guerrillas would find it much harder to operate in secret. Soon, they would have to fight not just Unionists or Federal soldiers, but the Confederate army as well, acting in defense of its citizens. As one guerrilla already stated, these men “wanted to be their own generals.” Such independence could not be controlled or coordinated. The guerrilla uprising would soon become a liability for both sides of the war, and the seeds of its destruction had already been sown.

\textsuperscript{55} Daniel Sutherland, \textit{A Savage Conflict}, 135.
\textsuperscript{56} United States War Department, \textit{Official Records}, vol. 22, pt. 1:165.
\textsuperscript{57} Unknown, “Southern Opposing to Guerrilla War Fare,” \textit{The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer}, April 28, 1862. http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbmareid=F46F44EAMTM2MjuwMTI3Ni40MiEyODI6MToxMzoxMzoxMzoxMzoxMTI2Ljc4LjE2&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=11&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=11&p_docnum=1&p_doref=v2:123D88C6895AE516@EANX-1263233AA0E80E98@2401289-1263233AD7ABCC98@1-1263233BA9D4D108@Southern+Opposing+to+Guerrilla+War+Fare (accessed March 5, 2013).
The guerrilla war in 1863 reflected both the newly-internecine nature of the struggle as well as the continued brutality of the conflict. Although Missouri and most of Arkansas were under occupation, the countryside of both remained plagued by guerrillas. One of the most infamous guerrilla raids of the war occurred on August 21, 1863 in Lawrence, Kansas. The chieftain of the Missouri perpetrators was William Quantrill. Indicative of the varied origins of guerrillas, Quantrill was a middle-class school teacher from Ohio. Relishing in the violence of irregular warfare, he had begun the war as a northern “jayhawker” before switching his allegiance. Like many guerrillas, the outlaw attempted to garner legitimacy for his actions by falsely claiming to possess an officer’s commission in the Confederate army. Quantrill led one of the largest guerrilla bands in the state, and caused mayhem among Unionists and northern soldiers by ambushing trains, burning homes, and murdering captured soldiers and sympathizers. Union officials found Quantrill’s terror activities so disruptive that they held five female relatives of his men hostage. Tragically, the structure in which the women were housed collapsed, killing some of the prisoners. In retribution, Quantrill led five hundred men over the border to Lawrence, Kansas, an abolitionist stronghold. There, they murdered one-hundred fifty men and boys and fired the town. The foray, apart from exemplifying the vicious terror-tactics of guerrillas, proved that they remained a potent threat.

The cycle of vengeance was not yet over. In perhaps the most drastic reprisal of the war, Union General Thomas Ewing, commander of the department, issued a decree ordering the complete depopulation of three and a half counties of Missouri near the

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The twenty thousand inhabitants of this region were forced to leave their homes, most of which were then destroyed. The series of events that cumulated in the indiscriminate banishment of thousands of people is indicative of the escalation and retribution inherent in a guerrilla war.

For the Confederacy, ending such guerrilla excesses became essential in 1863. The Union armies had steadily advanced into middle Tennessee, and in July, the South suffered the twin reverses of Vicksburg’s capture opening the Mississippi River and General Lee’s repulse at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The former defeat hindered communication between the western and eastern halves of the Confederacy, while the latter damaged the South’s hopes of recognition abroad. With these reverses in the conventional war, the Confederacy had to ensure the morale of its armies and citizens more than ever. Every time a guerrilla looted a citizen, the Confederacy appeared impotent to its people, as well as to observers in the North and abroad. Also, the South had suffered heavy casualties after years of fighting, and begrudged the number of deserters who left its undermanned armies for the sake of personal gain. In addition, such depredations encouraged a severe response by the Federals, and angered Confederate soldiers who worried about their families. One Rebel soldier expressed a sentiment many of his peers felt about guerrillas in general: “Those guerrilla bands of ours that swarm around Memphis I think caused those people who live around there an immense deal of trouble, whilst they are doing the cause scarcely any good at all.”

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60 Michael Fellman, *Inside War*, 95.
61 John W. Harris to mother, March 27, 1863, John W. Harris Letters, quoted in Daniel Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict*, 155.
Accordingly, the Confederate military took active measures to suppress outlaw guerrillas. The attempt to incorporate guerrillas into the regular army in 1862 via the Partisan Ranger Act had failed. Now direct force was necessary. In regions too far behind enemy lines, such as Missouri, this was not possible. But in areas within reach of Confederate forces; along the frontier in southern Arkansas or middle Tennessee for example, southern commanders issued specific orders aimed at curtailing illicit guerrilla activities. One Confederate officer wrote in November of that year: “Gross and repeated outrages have been committed upon persons and property of civilians. . . . The most stringent measures alone can check them.”62 Frequently, confrontations between Confederate authorities and bushwhackers ended in pitched battle.63 Confederate General William Steele, commander in Southern Arkansas, reported that he was forced to commit an entire regiment of cavalry to combating irregulars “who were committing daily deeds of violence and bloodshed.”64 Soon, the Confederates emulated the Union’s practice of executing any brigand-guerrillas they captured.65 Though traditional guerrillas, those who focused on fighting the occupying Union soldiers and Unionists, continued their attacks through 1863-4, this group’s efforts were slowly marginalized by opportunistic bandits.

The Union meanwhile continued its policies of recruiting indigenous military units and conducting reprisals against civilian property. One Illinois private grimly

62 General Orders 49, 60, November 3, 1863, Departmental Records, Trans-Mississippi Department, District of Arkansas, RG 109, National Archives and Records Administration, quoted in Robert Mackey, *Inside War*, 39.
63 Robert Mackey, *The Uncivil War*, 40.
65 Daniel Sutherland, “The Real War in Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*: 274.
remarked: “Confiscation and extermination is our motto.”

Sometimes just suspicion of being a guerrilla was enough to get a civilian killed by vengeful troops. Prisoners were killed out of hand. Such acts were largely accepted by Union officials who were frustrated by the chaos the violent revolt caused. The New York Times declared in September of 1863 that “Missouri is to-day more dangerously disturbed, if not more dangerously disloyal, than Mississippi.”

Another article of that year from an Illinois newspaper summarized the Federal government’s position on guerrillas, as well as the increasingly criminal nature of the guerrilla war itself:

They have no claims under the laws of warfare; they are out of the pale of their protection, placed there by their own reckless violation of those laws. The picking off of men here and there, and these raids upon families and villages, where murder and plunder are the only motives, and not in any sense the furtherance of the object of war, should be punished with death, without even the form of a trial. Let no such men be taken prisoner.

The guerrilla war of 1863 was therefore defined by increasing tension between the southern populace, along with its government, and the guerrillas, many of whom had progressively degenerated into mere robbers rather than politically motivated fighters. After three years, through improvisation and concerted effort, the Union was still unable to suppress the guerrilla war in Arkansas and Missouri, though it had considerably diminished its strategic impact on the conventional war after 1862. The Mississippi River

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66 D.L. Ambrose, From Shiloh to Savannah: The Seventh Illinois Infantry in the Civil War, quoted in Daniel Sutherland, A Savage Conflict, 175.


69 Unknown, “Parson Brownlow’s Paper,” Centralia Sentinel, December 10, 1863. [http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/His tArchive/?p_product=EANX&d_viewref=sea rch&qp_queryname=7&d_docum=1&p_docref=v2:12057668B3DDFD6A@EANX-120C76B8A253C010@2401850-1206D4711EBEB658@0-1311C990ED9181C4@ParsonBrownlow%27s+Paper](http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/His tArchive/?p_product=EANX&d_viewref=search&qp_queryname=7&d_docum=1&p_docref=v2:12057668B3DDFD6A@EANX-120C76B8A253C010@2401850-1206D4711EBEB658@0-1311C990ED9181C4@ParsonBrownlow%27s+Paper) (accessed March 7, 2013).
had been protected well enough to facilitate Grant’s advance to Vicksburg, though he also lessened its importance by living off the land, as General Curtis had done in Arkansas a year earlier. Union armies, meanwhile, advanced steadily into Tennessee. If, by mid-1863, the Union’s war effort was not critically disabled, Unionist and “Secesh” civilians still continued to suffer deprivation, murder, and intimidation at the hands of “independent (bushwhacker) companies” and resentful Federal troops. The unconventional violence also continued to be a political liability for both sides, as Richmond and Washington both sought to prove their credibility and vitality by protecting their citizens and maintaining law and order in their territory.

Both polities carried these priorities into 1864, a crucial year in the conventional war. Although the Union had won great victories over the last year, occupying large swathes of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee, the cost had been high. 1864 was an election year. The Union offensives against Richmond and Atlanta appeared stalled, casualties were mounting, and if the northern voters considered the cost too great, President Abraham Lincoln might not be reelected, and a peace candidate might win instead. Victory could therefore not be taken for granted, and the continued insurrections that challenged Federal control of lands occupied for years did not radiate confidence to the public. Renowned military theoretician General Carl von Clausewitz famously stated that “War is politics (or policy) by other means.”[^70] Although in strictly military terms the guerrilla conflict had lost much of it decisiveness, it retained its political importance, and could therefore still impact the course of the war.

This reality was true for the Confederacy as well. Even pro-secession civilians were welcoming Union authorities as a safeguard against the cruelties of the bandit-insurrectionists. This obviously undermined Richmond’s popular support and ability to continue the war. Like the North then, the Davis administration believed it was in its best interests to suppress the wanton violence in the west. Many Confederates, from enlisted soldiers to commanding officers, embraced the decision. One legal irregular, a partisan ranger captain in Arkansas, manifested in microcosm the fears and attitudes of his government. “There have been men in this country,” he said, “committing crimes on my credit, and if I find them the weather is two [sic] hot to Ride [sic] horses to headquarters with any such caracters [sic].”71 To counter the illegal combatants’ impersonation of Confederates when they looted, the Confederacy adopted a voucher system for any goods they requisitioned.72 Citizens could then distinguish government officials from the outlaws who impersonated them. In accordance with these negative views, Confederate authorities ordered the arrest and execution of all bushwhackers, regardless of their political loyalties, who had committed crimes against civilians, and commanded unauthorized irregular companies (guerrillas) to be broken up.73

Although northern and southern commanders often disagreed about the legality of certain irregulars like cavalry raiders or partisan rangers, they were in substantial agreement concerning guerrillas by 1864. One Union soldier, witnessing the execution of two guerrillas guilty of lynching several Unionists, noted that, “There can be no question

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71 John Connelly to Harris Flanagin, February 29, 1864, July 17, 1864, Kie Oldham Collection, quoted in Daniel Sutherland, “The Real War in Arkansas,” The Arkansas Historical Quarterly: 274.
these two unprincipled assassins richly merited their fate, and hence it was impossible to entertain for them any feeling of sympathy.” A Union soldier named Lemuel Abijah Abbott wrote of one irregular: “[I] wonder if he thinks guerrilla warfare is manly? Some people are born guerrillas, though, and have no conception of honor. I’d go and drown myself before I’d practice that kind of warfare.” These views remained consistent with the statements of Union soldiers and leaders from the beginning of the war. After years of fighting, the Yankees had retained their disgust of bushwhackers. Summary executions therefore continued unabated, though the Union continued to develop inventive tactics to counter bushwhackers.

Although the Federals had successfully, though not completely, countered the guerrilla threat to army operations through the use of locally-raised regiments, spies, and area devastation, they had fallen short in protecting Unionist civilians, despite the presence of nearly 12,000 troops in Arkansas. A creative colonel named Marcus La Rue Harrison, creator of the First Arkansas Cavalry (Union), developed the idea of Unionist colonies, to be used in conjunction with the afore-mentioned techniques. The fortified settlements would shelter loyal southerners from outlaws. The sites were chosen by Harrison, and all living within ten miles of them were forced either to join the colony or leave. These agricultural villages freed Harrison of the burden of defending their inhabitants, as well as providing useful supply depots. Acting as “stepping stones,” the

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76 Daniel Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict*, 208.

communities allowed Union counter-guerrilla operations to extend their range, as they could rely on the resources of the colonies as they advanced deeper into contested territories. The area of operations for the irregulars was likewise restricted, as the network of colonies acted similar to a fence, hemming the guerrillas in, and lessening their mobility.

Actively persecuted by both sides, the guerrilla war had failed by the end of 1864, in that it could not influence the final outcome of the war. Lincoln was reelected, Atlanta had been captured, and Richmond would soon follow in April of the next year. Although violence remained rampant throughout the year, the guerrillas had neither discouraged enough northern civilians, nor distracted enough Union troops, to prevent either event. Evidently, though, this had ceased to be the primary concern of many citizen-warriors by 1864. At the beginning of the war, the bushwhackers had chosen their mode of war for mostly personal reasons of independence or revenge, rather than as part of a collective identity like Confederate soldiers (or citizens) had displayed. By the end of the struggle, this self-serving mindset manifested itself in a number of thieves, who were more concerned with personal gain than the advancement of a political ideology. The confusion of authority over whom the bushwhackers answered to, and the hardships the destruction of war brought, encouraged such sentiment.

In 1865, with its armies shattered and its cities occupied, the only choice that seemed to remain to the Confederacy was whether to dissolve what was left of its armies and embrace insurrection throughout the remainder of its territory, or surrender. The former course was what one officer suggested to General Robert E. Lee, rather than capitulate to Union General Ulysses Grant. Lee famously replied:
If I took your advice, the men would be without rations and under no control of officers. They would be compelled to rob and steal in order to live. They would become mere bands of marauders, and the enemy’s cavalry would pursue them and overrun many wide sections they may never have occasion to visit. We would bring on a state of affairs it would take the country years to recover from.

And, as for myself, you young fellows might go to bushwhacking, but the only dignified course for me would be, to go to General Grant and surrender myself and take the consequences of my acts.\textsuperscript{78}

The situation Lee described was, of course, not hypothetical, but had in fact already occurred in Missouri and Arkansas. Bushwhacking had already been tried, and the results had been immense suffering for the people. Lee’s decision portrayed a dichotomy between the individualistic thinking of the guerrilla and his own more communal views. When Jefferson Davis later enquired to his cabinet if the irregular war should be pursued, Secretary of State Judah Benjamin reiterated Lee’s estimation, saying, “Guerrilla or partisan warfare would entail far more suffering on our own people than it would cause damage to the enemy,” and that the southern people would not sustain such a conflict. The cabinet concurred with this conclusion.\textsuperscript{79} Benjamin’s estimation was given credence by an article printed in Georgia’s The Macon Telegraph, a newspaper that had, under its previous editor, formally urged guerrilla warfare earlier in the war. In June of 1865 though, the Telegraph endorsed the words of Methodist Bishop Paine, who urged his countrymen to “not yield to the temptations to carry on guerrilla warfare, which we have ever regarded as wrong in principle. Such a warfare, moreover, would result in no


\textsuperscript{79} Benjamin to Davis, April 22, 1865. United States War Department, Official Records, (ser. 1) vol. 43, pt. 3: 821-34.
good, but bring great and continued distress upon the country." Both the leadership and the people of the Confederacy had rejected guerrilla warfare. Though lawlessness would prevail in some parts the aftermath of the war, there would not be a mass-insurrection of the entire South. The war was over.

Why, in such a vast and rugged territorial expanse, populated by a determined people, had guerrilla war not succeeded? The military policy of the Union played an important role. Recognizing the threat and disruption from guerrillas, the Union altered its occupation policies to better combat the Rebel civilians. A large part of this policy was retributive burning and confiscation, which would become standard policy throughout the occupied South. Alongside these widely-dispersed measures however the Union also developed more precise counter-guerrilla tools, such as the provost-martial’s spy network, and locally-raised anti-guerrilla units. That the guerrillas instigated this great change in methodology is proof of the chaos they caused.

More critical than the Union’s countermeasures though was the movement’s own internal failings. As countless observers, North and South, had noted, the guerrillas could not be controlled, and preyed on friend and foe alike. The wild independence of the perpetrators disallowed for a concerted effort on their part, and invited abuse of non-combatants. Had the South waged a state-wide insurrection, the Union would have faced not a united Confederacy, but rather countless smaller, private wars. Though frustrating, such a dispersed effort could not have defeated a determined, unified North, especially since southerners likely would have turned against the guerrillas. Where guerrilla war did

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happen, in Missouri and Arkansas, this reality became apparent. There was no organized command structure of the Rebel bushwhackers. Rather, numerous bands fought who, where, and when, they chose. When they chose to abuse the civilians who offered them food, shelter, and intelligence, the irregular fighters undermined one of the crucial advantages their mode of war possessed. Besides depriving themselves of these services, the bandits drew the ire of the Confederacy itself and most of its citizenry, despite its supposed support of their cause.

While the guerrilla war initially succeeded in performing all three functions of irregular warfare (diversion, logistical destruction, and erosion of enemy willpower), these internal shortcomings destroyed their decisiveness. The jealously-guarded independence of various groups of bushwhackers, combined with a complete lack of any unifying war aims, fore-ordained the movement to incoherence. Without cooperation with each other, let alone Confederate forces, the guerrillas could not hope to systematically destroy the northern occupation. This lack of structure and unity led to the destruction of their popular base, and with it the reversal of the advantages they had previously accrued to the Confederate war effort in diverting troops and eroding enemy morale. Since their war was so exclusively local and personal, the former had not really been a conscious goal in the first place.

Though often ignored in studies today, guerrilla warfare was the primary Civil War experience of countless thousands of civilians and combatants in places like Arkansas and Missouri. Although the civilian Rebels had initially threatened the Union war effort, by the time the conventional forces of the Confederacy had lost, so too had the guerrillas. The cost of waging this type of war was widespread misery and destruction.
As the military theoretician Antoine Henri Jomini wisely concluded, “The spectacle of a spontaneous uprising of a nation is rarely seen; and, though there be in it something grand and noble which commands our admiration, the consequences are so terrible that, for the sake of humanity, we ought to hope never to see it.”

Conclusion

Though rarely discussed in depth, irregular warfare was an important reality in the Civil War, and one that the Union never fully solved. Thousands of irregulars of all descriptions proved to be among the most indefatigable and successful opponents of the Union. In areas that would have otherwise remained uncontested, southern irregular warriors required the Union to invest considerable resources to maintain control of territories it had already “conquered,” or forfeit considerable political, material, and strategic capital to its enemies.

Although the Union created some innovative counter-measures, these tactical innovations proved unable to decisively neutralize any of the three forms of irregular warfare. Despite their disproportionate and influential successes, irregular warfare was practiced only on a limited scale, never systematically pursued or widely adapted by Confederate leaders. Too often, the initiative behind irregular operations came from the practitioners themselves. The Confederacy’s decision not to pursue irregular activity on a grander scale was the chief impediment to its success.

In the American Civil War, not all forms of irregular warfare had proven themselves equal. When Sherman wrote that he dreaded the Confederate armies would disperse and “instead of dealing with six or seven States we will have to deal with numberless bands of desperados, headed by such men as Mosby, Forrest,…and others,” he tellingly referred only to partisan ranger and cavalry raider leaders, not guerrillas. ¹ It was not civilian guerrillas like Quantrill or Ferguson that Sherman was concerned with,

but disciplined, professional cavalry raiders and partisan rangers. These men were
dedicated to their cause and had proven capable of consistent, effective resistance against
great odds. Crucial for the professionally trained leadership of the Confederacy, they
could also receive orders and coordinate their actions with other Rebel forces. In view of
the three principles of irregular warfare discussed (erosion, the logistical strategy, and
diversion of troops) the enlisted irregulars had proven themselves capable, despite their
small numbers and bureaucratic opposition.

Of all the irregulars, cavalry raiders were most accepted by the Confederate
leadership. Raiders, as the most conventional of irregulars, enjoyed a more accepted
status in conventional warfare than the other types of fighters. The role of light cavalry in
logistical strikes had been familiar in the eighteenth century, and, as has been seen, was
noted and praised by Clausewitz and Jomini as well. Cavalry raiders were therefore a
more palatable option to the professional southern leadership because of their familiarity.
Also important was the fact that they did not remain indefinitely behind enemy lines, so
commanders need not permanently relinquish control of the men.

Even so, men like Forrest and Morgan were often kept on a short leash. In part
this was the inevitable result of their more traditional status; politicians and many
commanders were unwilling to relinquish control of any part of a field army for extended
periods of time. The impetus for raiding thus stemmed from the raiders themselves or
their immediate superiors. They were not organized into dedicated and specialized units.
As a result, raiding was an ad hoc response rather than a widespread, systematic strategy.
Even when Sherman’s Atlanta Campaign offered raiders a tempting target with strategic
importance, President Davis chose instead to consign Forrest to a conventional defense of Mississippi.

Partisan rangers suffered from a similar neglect by the government in Richmond. More irregular than cavalry raiders, partisan rangers were also less accepted by friend and foe. Though to outsiders they closely resembled guerrillas, under leaders like Mosby partisan rangers were perhaps the most disruptive irregulars in proportion to the resources allocated. Man for man, partisan rangers likely tied down more enemy troops, destroyed more material, and garnered more press than any other enlisted men in either army. Although they could not themselves defeat a Union campaign, due to their small numbers, McNeill and Mosby none the less effectively resisted the occupation of thousands of Union troops with only a few hundred men.

The greatest failing of partisan warfare was the Confederacy’s inability to duplicate these results. Mosby and McNeill’s success was the fortunate result of legislation directed elsewhere. Rather than recruit promising officers and men from the ranks for duty behind enemy lines as partisans, the Partisan Ranger Act unsuccessfully attempted to control the guerrilla war in the West by incorporating the emerging fighters into the Confederacy. As a result, many “partisan rangers” never stopped being guerrillas, and most of the latter never took part in the charade at all. Because the Confederacy never developed a process of cultivating potential officers and men for partisan duty, the successes of men like Mosby and McNeill were, like cavalry raiders, entirely due to individual initiative. While officers like Forrest and Mosby possessed uncommon and valuable characteristics like independence and innovation that were essential to irregular
success, Richmond did not attempt to locate or replicate this leadership in other irregular commands.

Neither partisan rangers nor cavalry raiders, though composed of men properly enlisted in the Confederate service who served under proven combat leaders, were taken seriously by the southern government. Both were instead regulated to a distinctly local and secondary status, because southern leaders feared losing control of resources and doubted that irregular warfare could achieve decisive results. Napoleonic warfare emphasized concentration of forces to destroy the enemy’s army. Irregular warfare in contrast required its practitioners to disperse into small, independent units to contest occupation. The latter thus represented the antithesis of West Point training and conventional military thinking. As the Confederate army suffered more and more casualties, its leaders were increasingly unwilling to risk their soldiers and their cause by embracing an unfamiliar strategy. Irregular warfare was therefore not considered an essential part of the Confederacy’s response to the northern invasion.

Guerrillas, while initially highly disruptive, had confirmed Richmond’s fears of irregular warfare by their indiscriminant violence and lack of discipline. Both resulted from the lack of an organized, unifying leadership or resilient ideology (embodied by the men who left their homes to fight in distant lands with the conventional field armies). These weaknesses doomed the guerrilla war to degenerate into anarchy and rapine, and undermined support for themselves and the Confederacy among the populace. The motivations of these guerrillas, at first stemming from their local orientation, and later increasingly dominated by predatory opportunism, rendered an organized pan-southern guerrilla movement impossible. The necessities of maintaining civilian support for
secession and controlling the slave population merely accentuated these underlying structural weaknesses. Guerrillas therefore had little in common with the twentieth century revolutionary movements some historians compare them to. Their defeat was not the result of Union responses but rather internal failings. Of the three types of irregular warfare in the Civil War, only guerrillas had proven themselves a failure.

It is important to note that partisan rangers, and especially cavalry raiders, were not designed, even in their ideal form, to fully replace conventional forces. Raiders especially depended on conventional armies to safeguard a “home territory” for them to return to, and serve as a safe base of operations. Partisan rangers, though existing behind enemy lines, performed their diversion and logistical feats, like the raiders, for the benefit of conventional forces.

Despite this caveat, it is clear from the performance of these soldiers that a greatly enlarged and systematic use of cavalry raiders and partisan rangers could have had decisive effects. By their hindrance of Union advances, bolstering of southern morale and exaction of political damage through their victories and resilience, these irregulars would have severely retarded Federal chances of success. When the Confederacy instead made the strategic decision to pursue a largely conventional war, they allowed the Union to use its inherent advantages in population size and materials to best affect.

When examining the possibilities of irregular warfare in the American Civil War, historians must consider that there were more actors, and options, than the civilian guerrillas seen in the Trans-Mississippi Department. Distinct from these fighters, though also irregular, cavalry raiders and partisan rangers offered the South a socially acceptable
(and thus sustainable), militarily and cost effective option that might have so greatly harassed the North as to affect the outcome of the war.
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