James
McPherson, For Cause and Comrades
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CHAPTER 2

WE WERE IN EARNEST

ONE OF THE phrases often used to describe the American Civil War is The Brothers' War. This imagery has both symbolic and literal meanings. The Union was a marriage consummated in 1776, but by 1858 it had become, in Lincoln's words, a house divided. One part of this troubled family decided to set up for themselves in 1861 because they feared that Father Abraham might deprive them of their most treasured possessions.

This breakup sometimes forced members of the same biological family to choose opposite sides. James and John Welsh grew up as brothers in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. In 1853 James moved to Illinois, where he became a Republican and voted for Lincoln in 1860. When Southern states in response to Lincoln's election formed an independent nation and fired on the American flag, James Welsh wrote to John back in Virginia that "Jeff Davis and his crew of pirates" had committed "treason and nothing more nor less." John replied angrily that he was "very much pained to find . . . that I have a brother who would advocate sending men here to butcher his own friends and relations. . . . I have always opposed secession but I shall vote for it today because I don't intend to submit to black Republican rule." John also told James that by becoming a Republican he had forsworn

"home, mother, father, and brothers and are willing to sacrifice all for the dear nigger." Stung by this charge, James responded that he never dreamed a brother of his would "raise a hand to tear down the glorious Stars and Stripes, a flag that we have been taught from our cradle to look on with pride. . . . I would strike down my own brother if he dare to raise a hand to destroy that flag. We have to rise in our might as a free independent nation and demand that law must and shall be respected or we shall find ourselves wiped from the face of the earth and our name become a byword and the principles of free government will be dashed to the ground forever." The two brothers never wrote or spoke to each other again. John enlisted in the 27th Virginia and was killed at Gettysburg; James fought in the 78th Illinois, marched through Georgia with Sherman, and survived the war.[1]

As South Carolina seceded on December 20, 1860, Commander Charles Steedman of the United States navy returned to American shores with his ship and publicly affirmed his loyalty to the Union. His statement would have attracted little attention had Steedman not been a native of South Carolina. His brother James, a low-country planter, wrote Charles an icy letter: "I felt that my blood was cold in my veins . . . my Brother a Traitor to his Mother County . . . where lie the bones of his Father, Mother, & many dear relatives." How could "a Brother in whose veins flows the same blood, Southern, *true* Southern . . . ever allow Northern principles to contaminate his pure soul"? The answer, James thought, must lie in Charles's six months' absence at sea which had left him ignorant of the determination of "those fanatics to interfere with our domestic affairs" and deny us the right "to keep our slaves in peace & quietness." Once Charles learned what was really going on, "we all expect you to do your duty to your God, your State, and Truth." But Charles had a different view of his duty. He expressed his intention to fight for God and Truth—but not for his state. "I am as I have always been," he wrote, "a Union man—I know no North or South . . . all that I know is my duty to flag & country under which I have served for the last 30 years." Charles was as good as his word, rising to the rank of captain and commanding Union warships on blockade duty and in the attacks on Charleston and Fort Fisher.[2]

Steedman could have resigned his commission and joined the Confederate armed forces. Hundreds of his fellow officers in the U.S. navy and army did just that. Their actions underlined a vital truth about the American Civil War: during its first year all of those who enlisted

and fought on one side or the other *chose to do so*. The same was true of most soldiers and sailors during the war's second year. Together these volunteers of 1861 and 1862 constituted the overwhelming majority of genuine fighting men during the war. Without their willing consent there would have been no Union and Confederate armies, no Civil War. The powerful convictions that propelled the Welsh and Steedman brothers toward fratricide motivated many of those volunteers as well.

The initial impulse came from what the French call *rage militaire*—a patriotic furor that swept North and South alike in the weeks after the attack on Fort Sumter. Northern cities and towns erupted overnight into volcanoes of oratory and recruiting rallies. "The heather is on fire," wrote a Harvard professor who had been born during George Washington's presidency. "I never knew what a popular excitement can be. . . . The whole population, men, women, and children, seem to be in the streets with Union favors and flags." In New York City, wrote a young man who enlisted on April 15, 1861, "the feeling runs mountains high, and thousands of men are offering their services where hundreds only are required."[3] Diarists recorded the *rage militaire* in Philadelphia. April 20: "A wild state of excitement." April 22: "Everyone I saw, with the exception of two or three Democrats, is filled with rage and resentment." April 30: "The city seems to be full of soldiers, most every other man in the street is in some kind of uniform."[4]

From Oberlin College on April 20 a student wrote to his brother that "WAR! and volunteers are only topics of conversation or thought. The lessons today have been a mere form. I cannot study. I cannot sleep, I cannot work." In Wooster, Ohio, a twenty-one-year-old carpenter wrote in his diary on April 16: "The president's war proclamation has been issued which causes no little excitement throughout the village. I went to work . . . in the morning but became so much excited by the war news that I was unable to resume my labors in the afternoon. Hearing that Spink & Shelby had opened a recruiting office I . . . put down my name." Two days later he reported "war fever 80 percent above par, still raising, received a dispatch from Col. that our company was accepted. Hurrah."[5]

Little wonder that Ohio's governor wired the War Department, which had given his state a quota of thirteen regiments under Lincoln's April 15 call for troops, that "without seriously repressing the ardor of the people, I can hardly stop short of twenty." The same was true of other Northern states, for the sentiments expressed by an Illinois farmer in a letter to his fiancée were widely shared: "My heart burns with indignation" against "armed *rebels* and *traitors* to their country and their country's flag." My hope "has always been for a peaceful, *quiet* home of my own, with you as a companion," but "I have concluded to volunteer in the service of my country. . . . This step will caus you pain and sorrow I know. . . . I love you still and always shall," but "I cant stay behind, no, no." They never married; he was killed in action in 1863.[6]

In the seven cotton states that seceded before April 1861 the fires of martial enthusiasm had spread for months without benefit of the spark of Fort Sumter that kindled the flame of Northern patriotism. Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for troops ignited the crucial upper South states of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee (along with Arkansas) to the same white-hot incandescence. In Richmond a huge crowd marched to the state capitol, lowered the American flag, and ran up the Confederate stars and bars. Everyone "seemed to be perfectly frantic with delight," wrote a participant. "I never in my life witnessed such excitement." In Goldsboro, North Carolina, a correspondent of the *Times* of London watched "an excited mob" with "flushed faces, wild eyes, screaming mouths, hurrahing for 'Jeff Davis' and 'the Southern Confederacy.' "[7] In Charlottesville an eighteen-year-old student at the University of Virginia wrote in his diary on April 17: "No studying today. The news of Va.'s secession reached here about 10 oc'lk amid huzzas and shouts. . . . 'War!' 'War!' 'War!' was on placards all about. My company was called at 4:45. All was excitement and 'go.' " From Nashville a new recruit wrote that "nothing else is talked of anywhere but War War." He did not expect the fighting to last long, for "the scum of the North *cannot* face the chivalric spirit of the South."[8]

The *rage militaire* of April and May 1861 eventually cooled. But it flared up again at later points of crisis in the war. Enlistments also rose and fell, often in inverse proportion to the fortunes of war. Additional Northern volunteers flocked to the colors after the humiliating rout at Bull Run in July 1861 and after the setback of the Seven Days in June and July 1862. Another wave of Southerners enlisted in response to Union invasions and Confederate defeats in the early months of 1862.

Most of these volunteers professed patriotic motives for enlisting. A young clerk in the lumber business in Massachusetts sought his parents' consent before he joined up, but whether they consented or

not "I *am going*. . . . I am not laboring under any 'sea fit,' as I once was, but a duty which everyone ought to perform,—love of country." Although "decidedly homesick," a nineteen-year-old Indiana farm boy who enlisted in July 1861 was determined to stick it out "to aid my country in her desperate struggle against oppression and slavery, against Rebels and Traitors."[9] A twenty-four-year-old clerk in a small Michigan town defied the wishes of both his wife and parents to enlist in August 1861, trying to explain that "the state of the country" required "all true patriots to sustain her government. . . . They admitted that our country needed men but their plea was that thare was anuff without me but I had made up my mind to enlist so thare was no stoping me." An unmarried farmer from Michigan had no such complications. "The Government must be sustained," he wrote to his sister after enlisting in August 1861, for "if the union is split up the goverment is distroid and we will be a Rewind [ruined] nation. . . . Do not borrow eny trouble about me if I dy in the batle feild I [do so] with plasure."[10] In August 1862 he was killed at the battle of Baton Rouge.

Many Union soldiers explained in more depth the ideological convictions that moved them to enlist. Lincoln had said in his inaugural address that secession was "the essence of anarchy" for it defied the Constitution and the rule of law. Union volunteers echoed these words. "This contest is not the North against South," wrote a young Philadelphia printer six days before he enlisted. "It is government against anarchy, law against disorder." An Indiana lawyer who rose to brigadier general during the war and secretary of state after it told his pacifist wife in April 1861 that "it is better to have war for one year than anarchy & revolution for fifty years—If the government should suffer rebels to go on with their work with impunity there would be no end to it & in a short time we would be without any law or order." An immigrant working in a Philadelphia textile mill explained to his father back in England why he had enlisted in the 3rd New Jersey. "If the Unionists let the South secede," he wrote, "the West might want to seperate next Presidential Election . . . others might want to follow and this country would be as bad as the German states. . . . There would have to be another form of a constitution wrote and after it was written who would obey it?"[11]

Union volunteers invoked the legacy of the Founding Fathers. They had inherited a nation sanctified by the blood and sacrifice of that heroic generation of 1776. If disunion destroyed this nation, the generation of 1861 would prove unworthy of the heritage of republican liberty. "Our fathers made this country, we their children are to save it," wrote a young lawyer to his wife who had opposed his enlistment in the 12th Ohio, leaving her and two small children behind. If "our institutions prove a failure and our Country be numbered among the things that were but are not . . . of what value will be house, family, and friends?" Civil war "is a calamity to any country," wrote a recruit in the 10th Wisconsin, but "this second war I consider equally as holy as the first . . . by which we gained those liberties and privileges" now threatened by "this monstrous rebellion."[12]

Relatively few Union volunteers mentioned the slavery issue when they enlisted. But those who did were outspoken in their determination to destroy the "slave power" and to cleanse the restored Union of an evil they considered a mockery of American ideals of liberty. The main purpose of "this wicked rebellion," wrote an Iowa volunteer, was "to secure the extension of that blighting curse—slavery—o'er our fair land." An Ohio artillery officer believed in June 1861 that the war "will not be ended until the subject of slavery is finally and forever settled. It has been a great curse to this country." A Massachusetts infantry captain, a Harvard graduate, wrote to his mother in November 1861 that "Slavery has brought death into our own households already in its wicked rebellion. . . . There is but one way [to win the war] and that is emancipation. . . . I want to sing 'John Brown' in the streets of Charleston, and ram red-hot abolitionism down their unwilling throats at the point of the bayonet."[13]

Some Confederate volunteers did indeed avow the defense of slavery as a motive for enlisting. A young Virginia schoolteacher who joined the cavalry could not understand why his father, a substantial farmer and slaveowner, held out so long for preservation of the Union when reports in Southern newspapers made it clear that the Lincoln administration would "use its utmost endeavors for the abolishment of slavery." After all, Lincoln himself "has declared that one of the peculiar institutions of the South, which involves the value of four billions . . . is 'a moral evil.'" No true Southerner could hesitate. "Better, far better! endure all the horrors of civil war than to see the dusky sons of Ham leading the fair daughters of the South to the altar." A slave-owning farmer enlisted in the 13th Georgia because "our homes our firesides our land and negroes and even the virtue of our fair ones is at stake," while a young Kentucky physician told his slaveholding relatives that he would join the Confederate forces "who are battling for

their rights and for an institution in which Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee are [as] interested" as the lower South. "The vandals of the North . . . are determined to destroy slavery. . . . We must all fight, and I choose to fight for southern rights and southern liberty."[14]

This pairing of slavery and liberty as the twin goals for which Confederates fought appeared in many volunteers' letters. As Lincoln sarcastically put it, "the *perfect* liberty they sigh for" is "the liberty of making slaves of other people." Lincoln was not the first to make this point. Referring to the leaders of the American Revolution, most of whom owned slaves, Samuel Johnson had asked in 1775: "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?"[15] That question had struck an exposed nerve among many Americans of Thomas Jefferson's generation, who felt embarrassed by the paradox of fighting for liberty while holding other people in slavery.

Little of such feeling seems to have troubled Confederates in 1861. Some dealt with the paradox by denying that it existed. A lowcountry planter's son of aristocratic bearing who enlisted in a South Carolina regiment dismissed the rhetoric about the rights of man as "simple nonsense; I for one am fighting for the maintenance of no such absurdity. . . . We are appealing to chartered rights. . . . It is insulting to the English common sense of race [to say that we] are battling for an abstract right common to all humanity. Every reflecting child will glance at the darkey who waits on him & laugh at the idea of such an 'abstract right.'"[16]

But most Southern volunteers believed they were fighting for liberty as well as slavery. "Our cause," wrote one in words repeated almost verbatim by many, "is the sacred one of Liberty, and God is on our side." A farmer who enlisted in the 26th Tennessee insisted that "life liberty and property [i.e., slaves] are at stake" and therefore "any man in the South would rather die battling for civil and political liberty, than submit to the base usurpations of a northern tyrant."[17] One of three brothers who enlisted in a South Carolina artillery battery believed that "a stand must be made for African slavery or it is forever lost." The Confederate states were united by the institution of "slavery[,] a bond of union stronger than any which holds the north together," wrote the second brother. Therefore, added the third, the South's "glorious cause of Liberty" was sure to triumph. A wealthy planter who married one of Mary Todd Lincoln's sisters became an officer in the 4th Alabama to fight for "Liberty and Independence." "What would we be," he asked his wife, "without our liberty? . . .

[We] would prefer Death a thousand times to recognizing once a Black Republican ruler . . . altho' he is my brother in law."[18]

Southern recruits waxed more eloquent about their intention to fight *against* slavery than *for* it—that is, against their own enslavement by the North. "Sooner than submit to Northern slavery, I prefer death," wrote a slaveowning officer in the 20th South Carolina. The son of a Mississippi planter dashed off a letter to his father as he rushed to enlist: "No alternative is left but war or slavery." *Subjugation* was the favorite word of Confederate recruits to describe their fate if the South remained in the Union or was forced back into it. "If we should suffer ourselves to be subjugated by the tyrannical government of the North," wrote a private in the 56th Virginia to his wife, "our property would all be confuscated . . . & our people reduced to the most abject bondage & utter degradation." Thus "every Southern heart" must "respond to the language of the great Patrick Henry in the days of '76 & say give me Liberty or give me death." He met death at Gettysburg.[19]

This invocation of the Founding Fathers was as common among Confederate volunteers as among their Union counterparts—for an opposite purpose. Just as the American Patriots of 1776 had seceded from the tyrannical British empire, so the Southern Patriots of 1861 seceded from the tyrannical Yankee empire. Our Fathers "severed the bonds of oppression once," wrote a twenty-year-old South Carolina recruit, "now [we] for the second time throw off the yoke and be freemen still." The American Revolution established "Liberty and freedom in this western world," wrote a Texas cavalryman in 1861, and we are "now enlisted in 'The Holy Cause of Liberty and Independence' again."[20]

For Union and Confederate volunteers alike, abstract symbols or concepts such as country, flag, Constitution, liberty, and legacy of the Revolution figured prominently in their explanations of why they enlisted. For Confederate soldiers a more concrete, visceral, and perhaps more powerful motive also came into play: defense of home and hearth against an invading enemy. The territorial instinct is a potent drive in humans as well as in other animals. Studies of the will of armies to fight have found defense of the homeland to be one of the strongest of combat motivations.[21] "When a Southron's home is threatened," wrote a lawyer who organized an Alabama infantry company, "the spirit of resistance is irrepressible." We are "fighting for our firesides and property," reiterated many Confederate volunteers, to

defend our homes against "vandal enemies" and "drive them from the soil polluted by their footsteps. . . . I am determined to dispute every inch of soil with the Hessians e'er they shall invade the sunny south I will die in defending the country where all doth dwell that I hold dear and sacred."[22]

Several Confederate enlistees echoed Southern propaganda about the rapacious designs of Yankee invaders. A Georgia planter wrote to his wife from the camp of the 6th Georgia in June 1861 that it would be "glorious" to die "in defence of innocent girls & women from the fangs of the lecherous Northern hirelings, who from the accounts here stated, are indeed engaging in this strife, for 'beauty & booty.' " Fifteen months later he was killed far from Georgia, at Sharpsburg, Maryland.[23]

As residents of the first state to experience invasion, Virginians tended to express the strongest convictions about this matter. Unionism had persisted longer in the state of James Madison and John Marshall than in the lower South. Like Robert E. Lee, a good many Virginians such as a twenty-year-old graduate of the University of Virginia had vowed not to fight "unless it be in defence of Virginia." He enlisted when his state seceded because it became clear that Virginia would become a battleground. A native of the commonwealth who had moved west and had enlisted in the 9th Mississippi could scarcely wait for his unit to be sent to Virginia: "I would give all I have got just to be in the front rank of the first brigade that marches against the invading foe who now pollute the sacred soil of my native state with their unholy tread."[24]

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF *duty* was pervasive in Victorian America. Union volunteers filled their letters and diaries with such phrases as "I went from a sense of duty"; if my three-months regiment reenlists for three years "it would be my duty to go"; I must sacrifice "personal feelings and inclinations to . . . my duty in the hour of danger"; in enlisting "I performed but a *simple* duty—a duty to my country and myself . . . to give up *life* if need be . . . in this battle for freedom & right, opposed to slavery & wrong."[25]

Many Northern men found the language of duty essential to persuade reluctant parents or wives to sanction their decision to enlist. The English-born son of a farmer in upstate New York was sorry that his father "was so much opposed to my going to do my duty towards putting down this awful rebellion," but "I ought to and I must" fight for the "rights & Freedom" of "our adopted Country." The son of a Boston Brahmin, having completed his junior year at Harvard, insisted to his father that "it is every one's duty to enlist, if he possibly can, and why is it not mine as much as other people's? . . . If you are not willing to send your sons why should others be willing to send theirs?" A recruit in the 11th Michigan wrote to his fiancée, who had pleaded with him not to enlist: "No Jenny . . . while your happiness is as dear to me as life duty prompts me to go my country first home and friends next Jenny what would friends be to me if I had no country?"[26]

Victorians understood duty to be a binding moral obligation involving reciprocity: one had a duty to defend the flag under whose protection one had lived. "My country had a demand on me which made all my plans, calculations, hopes and expectations of minor consequence," wrote a schoolteacher two weeks after mustering into the 64th Ohio. A Kentucky physician explained to his sister why he joined the Union army: "I know no reason why I should not be as subject to duty as any man, as I have had the protection of government all my life. . . . My absence from home is, of course, a source of grief to Lida and the children . . . but an all-absorbing, all engrossing sense of duty, alike to country and family, impelled me." A lieutenant in a three-months Pennsylvania regiment wrote in May 1861 that "I will not enlist for a longer period than three months unless my country needs me, in which event I would enlist for life." That is precisely what he did, fighting for two years until captured at Gettysburg and dying in Libby prison.[27]

A good many Confederate soldiers also cited the obligations of duty. But they were more likely to speak of *honor*: one's public reputation, one's image in the eyes of his peers. To shirk duty is a violation of conscience; to suffer dishonor is to be disgraced by public shame. "Life is sweet but I would alwas prefer a honorable death to a disgraceful and shameful life," a sergeant in the 24th Mississippi told his sister. "I much reather be numbered amongst the slain than those that stay at home for it will be a brand upon their name as long as a southren lives."[28]

Honor was primarily a masculine concept, not always appreciated by wives who sometimes felt that a man's duty to his family was more important than pride in his reputation. Several married Confederate volunteers therefore found it necessary to lecture their wives and daughters on the finer points of the male code of honor. Even though

he was thirty-nine years old and father of several daughters, a South Carolina planter felt compelled to enlist after the Union capture of the South Carolina sea islands in November 1861. "I would be disgraced if I staid at home, and unworthy of my revolutionary ancestors," he explained to one daughter. "I stand alone in my family. There is no one bearing my name left to fight for our freedom. The honor of our family is involved. . . . A man who will not offer up his life . . . does dishonor to his wife and children." An Arkansas planter, also in his late thirties, told his wife that "on your account & that of my children I could not bear the idea of not being in this war. I would feel that my children would be ashamed of me when in after times this war is spoken of & I should not have figured in it."[29]

Honor and duty were not incompatible; indeed some Confederate volunteers mentioned both in the same breath. "No man now has a right to stay at home," a forty-two-year-old planter admonished his wife, who had opposed his enlistment in the 45th Tennessee. "Duty, patriotism and, aye, honour calls him to the field." Another planter who joined an Alabama cavalry regiment rebuked his wife for urging him to back out. "How can you ask me to remain at home an idle spectator? . . . My honor, my duty, your reputation & that of my darling little boy" call me forth "when our bleeding country needs the services of every man."[30]

A substratum of truth underlies the stereotype of the antebellum South as a society with a profound sense of honor (public reputation) while Yankees were driven by conscience (a private compact with God). Like all stereotypes, however, it oversimplifies a complex reality. The letters of Union soldiers also bristled with references to honor and its opposite, shame: "I should be ashamed of myself if I didnt do something." "I whould sooner loose my life then have my chrildren ashemed of their Father." "If I should come home alive, and live to be old, I want to be able to say that I fought willingly for my country and not have my name branded as coward." "We all of us have a duty to perform in this life. . . . My honor is now bound up with the Army. . . . God grant that my children may never blush for their father's memory."[31]

Among Confederates the emphasis on honor occurred most often in the letters of upper-class soldiers and officers. In the Union army such sentiments ranged more broadly across the social scale. But public prominence did intensify the potential for shame and dishonor if one stayed out of the army. Charles Francis Adams, Jr., the great-

grandson and grandson of America's second and sixth presidents, rejected the wishes of his father that he stay at home to manage family affairs while Charles Sr. went to London as American Minister to the Court of St. James and took his son Henry with him as secretary. "For years our family has talked of slavery and of the South, and been most prominent in the contest of words," wrote Charles Jr. to his father, who had run for vice president on the Free Soil ticket in 1848, "and now that it has come to blows . . . it seems to me almost disgraceful that in after years we should have it to say that of them all not one [of your sons] stood in arms for that government with which our family history is so closely connected." With or without his father's blessing, Charles intended to enlist "in this great struggle . . . to sustain the government and to show that in this matter our family means what it says." He went in as a lieutenant in the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry and emerged as colonel of the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry, a black regiment that was the first to enter Richmond when it fell in April 1865. The Ohio Republican leader Rutherford B. Hayes declared that "I would prefer to go into it [even] if I knew I was to die or be killed in the course of it, than to live through and after it without taking part." He went in as a major, was twice wounded and breveted major general, and later became president of the United States.[32]

At the other end of the social scale, adoptive Americans also felt the pull of honor. A Swedish immigrant explained to his wife why he must enlist in the 3rd Minnesota. Only five of nearly two hundred men who had thus far enlisted from the Red Wing area were Scandinavians, he noted. "People began to ask, Why don't you do anything for the defense of your country. . . . You have often spoken of how your people were loyal to their new country and to the party of freedom. . . . Are you too cowardly or too indifferent to defend yourselves and us?" He enlisted (and eventually rose to the rank of colonel) because "the honor of our nation [i.e., Swedish-Americans] was at stake."[33]

Duty and honor were closely linked to concepts of masculinity in Victorian America. Boyhood was a time of preparation for the tests and responsibilities of manhood. And there could be no sterner test than war. It quite literally separated men from boys. The letters and diaries of Union and Confederate volunteers alike—those in their thirties as well as those in their teens—are full of references to the need to prove one's self a man: "I determined to stand up to duty and preserve my manhood and honor let come what may" (20th Illinois).

"I would be less than a man if in any way I fell short of the discharge of duty at my country's call" (8th Missouri Confederate). "I really inwardly feel that I want to go and do my part—as a Man" (16th Pennsylvania Cavalry). Anyone who stays home "is no part of a man" (4th North Carolina).[34] "It ought to be a consolation to know that you have a Husband that is man enough to fight for his Country" (62nd Pennsylvania). "I have acted the part of a man" (3rd Virginia Cavalry). Anyone who cannot stand the hardships and dangers "had better pack his knapsack and gow home to his mother" (2nd Michigan, killed at Williamsburg).[35]

Two versions of manhood competed in the Victorian era: the hard-drinking, gambling, whoring two-fisted man among men, and the sober, responsible, dutiful son or husband. Some soldiers found that the army transformed them from one kind of man to the other, better kind. The wild habits of a Baltimore youth, son of a respectable baker, had driven his mother to a sickbed. In a sudden fit of remorse "I determined to enlist in the hope that I should at some time be engaged in a battle, and there have an end put to my worthless and disgraceful career." To his surprise the army sobered him up, inculcated a sense of responsibility, taught him self-respect, promoted him to sergeant, and "made a man of me."[36]

Southern soldiers affected a more boastful style of masculinity than Northerners, who tended to worry about whether they would pass the test of manhood. "There is not a man in the Southern army," wrote a lieutenant in the 4th Virginia, "who does not in his heart believe that he can whip three Yankees, he would consider it beneath his manhood to count on whipping a less number." This assertion hints at another motive for enlistment in both South and North: the quest for adventure, for excitement, for the glory to be won by "whipping" the enemy and returning home as heroes to an adoring populace. This romantic vision has existed at the outset of many wars. It marched to the Marne with the youth of France, Germany, and Britain in 1914. Americans sailed off to the "splendid little war" with Spain in 1898 in search of adventure and glory. The foremost student of soldiers in the American Civil War, Bell Irvin Wiley, maintained that "the dominant urge of many volunteers was the desire for adventure . . . the prevailing excitement, the lure of far places . . . the glory and excitement of battle."[37]

There is indeed evidence in soldiers' letters for these motives. Several volunteers linked the themes of adventure and glory to concepts of manhood and honor. A Pennsylvania cavalry recruit declared: "How often in boyhood's young days when reading the account of soldiers' lives have I longed to be a man, and now the opportunity has offered." The son of a South Carolina planter really did fit the stereotype of a "Southron" inspired by Sir Walter Scott. "I am blessing old Sir Walter Scott daily," he wrote soon after enlisting, "for teaching me, when young, how to rate knighly honour, & our noble ancestry for giving me such a State to fight for." A wound at the first battle of Manassas did not dim his romantic ardor. "I am like a knight in a beleagured fortress," he wrote a month later, "& must not pass out with the women & the sick, when the castle is to be stormed, so long as I can put on my harness & wield my blade." Heroic tales passed down by oral tradition and song also inspired visions of glory. A farmer's son from New York state reminded his father in 1862 of the time "when I was quite young, and listened with pleasure to hear you sing Old Kentucky Boys, and other war songs; and thought how I would like to become a soldier: that childish wish has now come to pass." Two years later this soldier died at Andersonville after being captured at Spotsylvania.[38]

Many others also discovered that the romance and glory of war had been exaggerated. A twenty-year-old planter's son who left college to enlist in the 12th North Carolina wrote his mother from training camp that "the excitement, the activity, and the novelty are perfectly captivating. I have a glorious time." The novelty wore off, however, and in February 1863 he wrote home: "I am sick and tired of the service and I would give almost anything to have this abominable war ended." He almost saw its end—but was killed in one of the last battles, at Five Forks on April 1, 1865. A Georgia soldier who had told his wife when he enlisted that he intended to "*immortalise* myself before I come home" never came home—he was killed at Fishers Hill. A lawyer impelled by patriotic rather than romantic motives helped recruit the 14th New Jersey and went into the service as its major. He wrote to his mother in 1862 to discourage his eighteen-year-old brother from enlisting. "If he expects fun and excitement (which between us is at the bottom of all his patriotism) he will be most emphatically mistaken. It is too preposterous to think of." The younger brother stayed home; the older brother was killed two years later in the third battle of Winchester.[39]

In explaining to family members and friends their motives for enlisting, far more volunteers mentioned patriotism and ideology than

adventure and excitement. Should we take them at face value? An historian of the American army in the Mexican War maintains that in soldiers' letters from that war "a desire for personal glory and adventure" was "sometimes masked in the rhetoric of patriotism."[40] It is not clear how he knows this. In any event, perhaps the same was true for Civil War volunteers. And perhaps also the many references to duty, honor, and manhood were only a glorified way of describing community and peer pressure that made a young man a demasculinized pariah if he failed to enlist.

Some soldiers admitted as much. On the first anniversary of his enlistment a private in the 72nd Indiana confessed to his parents that "I enlisted for what I couldent tell. I did it without reflecting what the life of a Volunteer was. . . . In fact I done it just to be doing." A captain in another Indiana regiment, disgusted with the large number of "beats" in his company, wrote sourly that "they all pretend to be ill whenever there is anything to do. . . . Nine tenths of them enlisted just because somebody else was going, and the other tenth was ashamed to stay at home."[41]

But the historian must be careful not to read too much between the lines of soldiers' letters. We cannot know that those who spoke of duty, honor, country, and liberty were merely "masking" other motives. For that matter, the motives of many volunteers were mixed in a way that was impossible for them to disentangle in their own minds. A young bank clerk in Massachusetts enlisted in the fall of 1861 because "we must all make sacrifices for the sake of the government that has protected us for so long" but also because "the fact has long been coming over me that I am living an aimless life" and that to fight for his country would make him "a good useful man in this world."[42] One kind of motive did not necessarily mask the other. It is impossible to understand how the huge volunteer armies of the Civil War could have come into existence and sustained such heavy casualties over four years unless many of these volunteers really meant what they said about a willingness to die for the cause.

Genuinely committed soldiers viewed that commitment with a clear and resolute eye. An abolitionist farmer in his late thirties who enlisted in the 20th New York, and whose son later joined the 120th New York and was killed in action, wrote in December 1861: "If any one enlists to be a soldier with any less motive than a pure sense of duty my humble opinion is that he will be disapointed any dream he may have indulged in will melt away like a frost under the influence of the June sun. . . . Let all come in welcome but let them know what is before them." A year after he went to war, a homesick soldier in the 24th Mississippi posed a rhetorical question to his fiancée: "Why am I here was it merely that I might be an actor in Seenes noval and exciting that I turned my back on all the delights of home and subjected myself to the untold trials and privations of camp life and the feareful dangers of the battle field?" No, he answered, "I am here because a numerous and powerful enemy has invaded our country and threatened our subjugation." On the first anniversary of his enlistment a soldier in the 36th Pennsylvania wrote of himself and his messmates: "When we enlisted in this war, we did no idle thing, *we were in earnest*. One year has passed away, and all the fancied romance of campaign life has proved itself to be stern reality to us, yet we are still *in* earnest, ready for another year of harder, bloodier work, if such is necessary to crush this wicked rebellion."[43]

These soldiers and hundreds of thousands like them soon enough encountered bloody work. How did they stand up to the fear and stress of combat?