

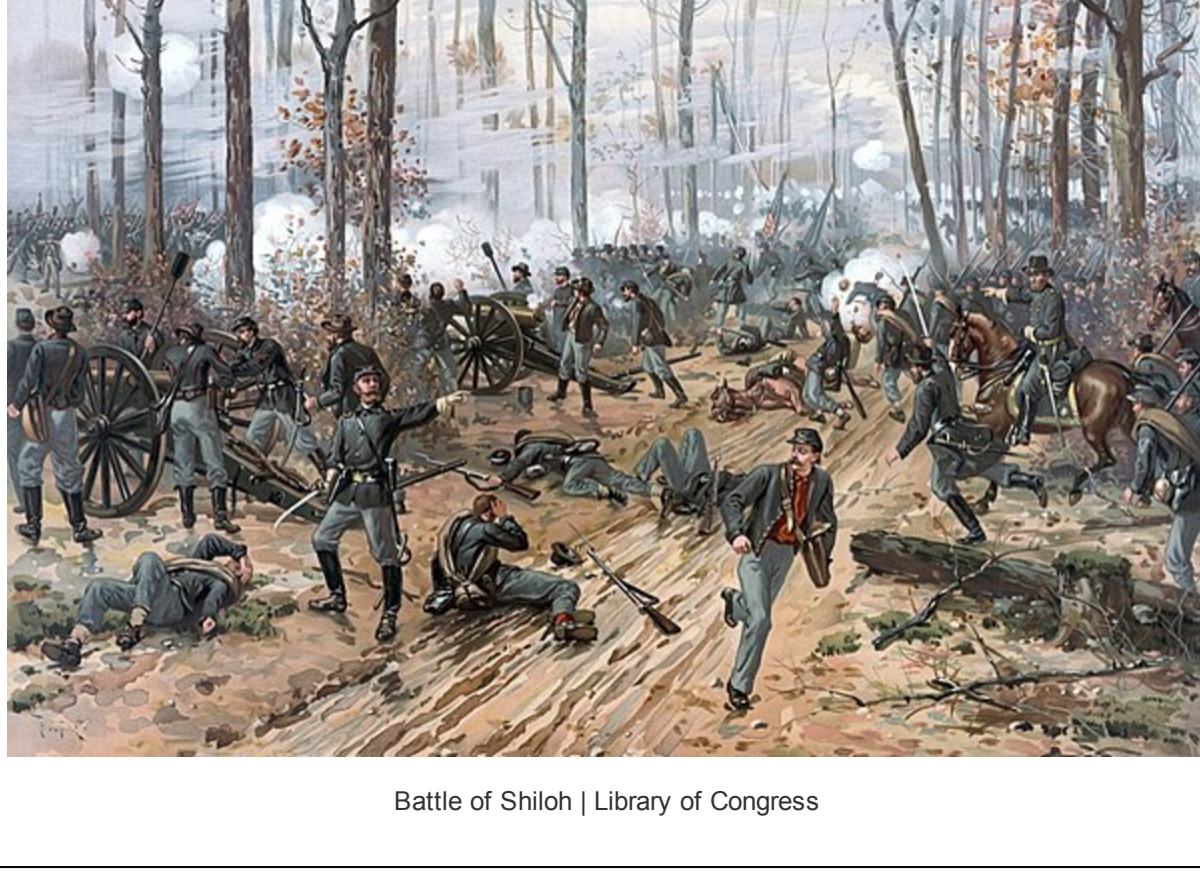


BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH

A Rich Man's War and a Poor Man's Fight

Robert Jenkins, September 21, 2020

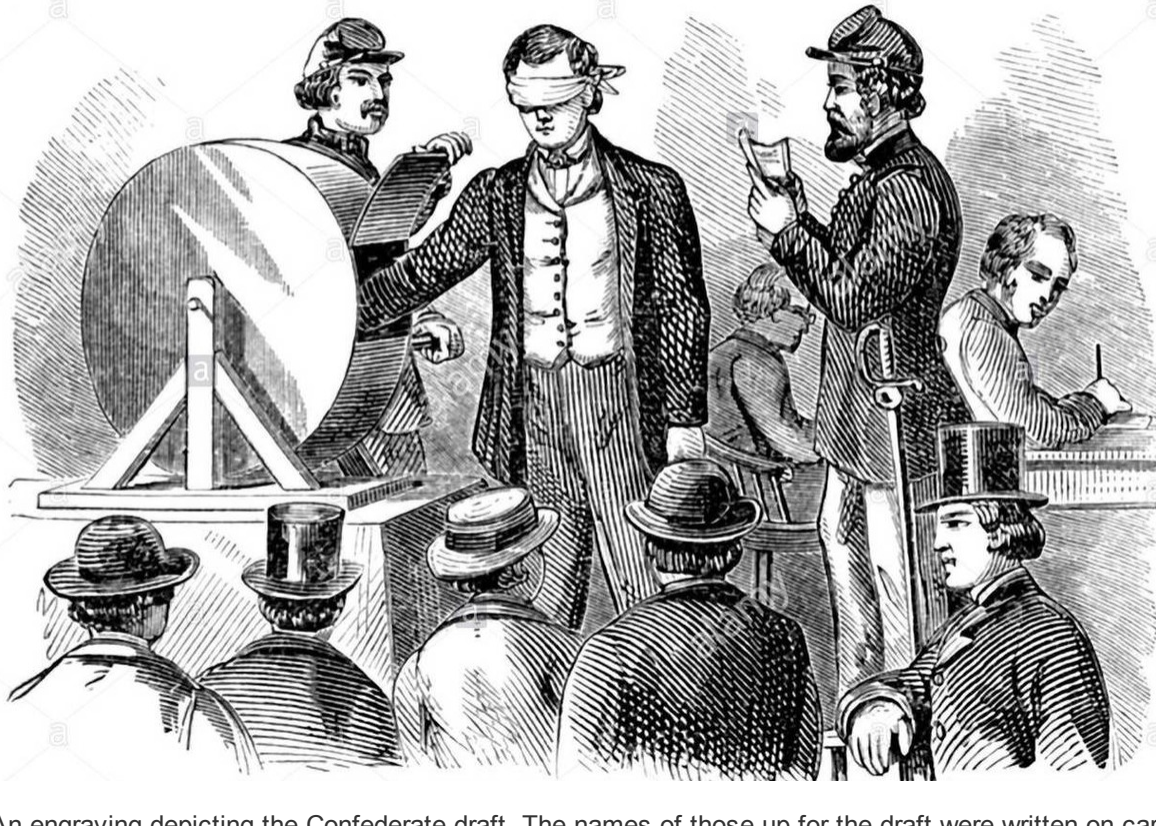
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Battle of Shiloh | Library of Congress

In the first year of the war, many excited young men from the North and South flocked to the training camps to fight for their side. After the Battle of First Manassas in July 1861 and the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862, the horrifically large casualty lists shocked the people of both sides. While the casualties at the Battle of First Manassas (also called First Bull Run) were high, approximately 2,000 Confederate losses and 3,000 Federal losses, those at the two-day Battle of Shiloh in Southwest Tennessee were staggering. With some 13,000 Federal losses and 10,700 Confederate losses at Shiloh, the combined 23,700 casualties were more than all of the American military losses from the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Mexican War combined. It became very apparent to everyone that many more men would be needed to decide the outcome of the war.

The fall of Forts Donelson and Henry in Tennessee in February, followed by the captures of Nashville and Memphis and the Rebel loss on the second day at Shiloh, left Tennessee prey to several Northern armies and opened the path to Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi in the Deep South. From February to April 1862, the Volunteer State had been overrun and the Gulf States appeared to be next. As a result, the governors from each Gulf State called for more volunteers to repel the Yankee parry into their region. In Richmond, President Jefferson Davis and the Confederate Congress continued to debate a conscription act, or draft, which would require service in the military. Some leaders, including Georgia Gov. Joe Brown, vehemently opposed the idea of the draft, and instead called out for volunteers to defend the state.



An engraving depicting the Confederate draft. The names of those up for the draft were written on cards and placed in the cylinder, to be selected by a blindfolded person in a public drawing.

In the Appalachian region of Northern Georgia, many in the predominantly Scotch-Irish populace married within their allied families for several generations, causing tightly knit relations among them. Much like the old clans of Scotland, these families shared with and protected one another. They worshiped together, farmed together, worked together, and lived together, and their primary loyalty was to the family alliances which formed their community, almost their "country." It was not likely then, that notions of southern independence compelled most of these "mountain folk" of the southern Appalachians to leave their allied families to go and fight. The majority of these families did not own slaves and could never afford to own slaves as they scratched out an existence, although they were not necessarily opposed to slavery. For most of them, it was the presence of a very real threat to their core value, the safety of their allied families, caused by the Yankee invasion of their homes, lands, and families during the spring of 1862, which led them to join the Confederate Army and spill their blood for it. Following the Battle of Shiloh, one young southern soldier who had been captured was asked why he was fighting if he didn't own any slaves or have a stake in southern independence. He simply replied, "Because you're down here."

Knowledge of an imminent draft that season also helped to swell the ranks, perhaps more so than any noble deed or grand speech. It was considered better to have bravely volunteered in the spring of 1862 than to wait to be conscripted and thought of as yellow by your peers. Besides, a \$50 bounty was paid to all volunteers and that didn't hurt. The Confederate draft that had been widely talked about during the winter of 1861-1862 would eventually come during the first week of May 1862. It required all able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 35 who were not exempted due to work as a machinist in a factory, foreman of a plantation, engineer on a railroad, or other similar duty, to serve.



Soldiers from Company D, 39th Georgia Infantry

As was typical of most wars, this one was indeed a "rich man's war, and a poor man's fight," at least it seemed that way to the common man, North and South. Many plantation owners and businessmen could avoid military service or the draft by "substituting" someone for them, meaning that they could pay someone to serve in their stead. Alternatively, they could also avoid serving in the military if they could show that they were needed to serve the nation in another capacity such as running a mill, a railroad, a plant, or a large plantation with its many slaves.

The South remained a sharply divided society in terms of wealth and resources, with a pronounced hierarchical social structure dictated by the institution of slavery. In Georgia, much of this concentration of wealth was on the coastal plain, or the Piedmont in the central portion of the state. The hill country of Northwest Georgia did not share in this wealth, and its absence shaped the political climate there in which many Confederate units were formed.

Typically, a regiment of infantry contained 10 companies of 100 men each, for a total of 1,000 men on paper. In 1861, when war drums first sounded, 4 units were formed from Whitfield and Murray Counties, accounting for approximately 400 men (or 100 for each Company). These units included the "Dalton Guards" (Co. B of Phillips Legion), the "Wright Infantry" (Co. H, 2nd Georgia Infantry Regiment) of Whitfield County, the "Murray Rifles" (Co. C, 11th Georgia Infantry Regiment), and Company D, 22nd Georgia Infantry Regiment, from Murray County.

During the spring of 1862, another 1,500 men and boys from Whitfield and Murray Counties helped swell the ranks of the Confederacy in newly formed Georgia regiments. These units included the "Fitzgerald Rifles" (Co. A, 34th Georgia Infantry Regiment); Cos B, C, G, H, and I (one-half of the 36th Georgia Infantry Regiment); and the "Wells Guards" (Co. C of the 39th Georgia Infantry Regiment), all of Whitfield County. Company A from the 37th Georgia Infantry Regiment, and the "Cohutta Rangers" (Co. A), along with Company B from the 39th Georgia Infantry Regiment came from Murray County. (The balance of the 39th Georgia came from other Northwest Georgia counties, including Catoosa, Chattooga, Dade, Gilmer, and Walker.) Additionally, a number of men and boys from Whitfield and Murray Counties joined cavalry and artillery units, and some even spent time in the Confederate Navy serving on ironclads and gunboats during the defense of Vicksburg.



The Fannin Guards

Before 1862 was over, 500 more men from Northwest Georgia were added to the ranks of the Confederacy as part of the 60th Georgia Infantry Regiment in the "Fannin Guards" (Co. B), the "Walker Independents" (Co. C), the "Whitfield Volunteers" (Co. D), the "Bartow Avengers" (Co. E.), and the "Gilmer Volunteers" (Co. F). Although these units had other local county ties, each of these five was formed in Dalton, and all had a number of Whitfield County members.

The rigors of camp life, marching, drilling, and combat quickly reduced the ranks of units to a fraction of their prescribed numbers. It was common for over 100 men of a regiment to die from exposure to disease and dysentery in camps without ever serving in a battle. In North and South alike, typically a new regiment would lose about a third of its number to illness during the first month of its existence and about 1 in 10 would die from disease in the first year, which is why most regiments never took to the fields of battle with more than a few hundred men at a time. The Northwest Georgia units were no exception. Dying without a battlefield's fiery honor, without the red badge of courage, was the fate of so many. In the 19th-century era of romanticism and chivalry, dying in battle for your home and cause was perhaps more important than even death itself. Death by dysentery and disease was both gruesome and inglorious. War that took the lives of its warriors without the honor of battle was indeed cruel.

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