Media as Weaponry: How Civil War Media Shaped Opinion and Morale

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Illustrations

Introduction

Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? These are the most rudimentary basics for any twenty-first century journalist. This is also a good way to explore history, and it is the lens I use to view and understand the role media played during the Civil War. As a trained journalist with an interest in the Civil War, I have often wondered how the media affected the fighting that took place from April 1861 to April 1865. By examining the various forms of available media during this period, I intend to illustrate that media had a significant impact on shaping the nation's opinion and morale during the war. In order to better understand the context in which these mediums functioned, it is important to first provide a brief background on the causes of the war itself.

While there were numerous factors and events that contributed to the start of the Civil War, the three largest causes, I would argue, were economic and social differences between the North and South, states' rights versus federal rights, and the increasingly problematic issue of slavery. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Northerners had become much more urbanized as cities became bigger and industrialization became more prominent. The South, however, maintained its agrarian lifestyle and had prospered, thanks in large part to Eli Whitney's cotton gin, created in 1793. Another major disagreement between the North and South came from the fight for state rights versus federal rights, an intense verbal and ideological battle that had been brewing since the creation of the American colonies. By the mid-nineteenth century, state versus federal rights had become a hotbed for disagreement. The South favored the right for states to make their own decisions with a loosely-based central government, while the North advocated for a strong, centralized government that would have more power than the individual states. The third important cause of the Civil War was the issue of slavery. Many

Southerners not only relied on the institution of slavery as a means for economic and social prosperity, they also whole-heartedly believed in slavery as the right thing to do. On the other hand, many Northern citizens rejected the idea of slavery and thought it was an antiquated system that needed to be abolished. Northerners largely thought the institution of slavery was cruel and an infringement on human rights, even if many of them were still racist and disliked black people.

For the purposes of this research, however, my focus will remain on the role of media during the war. There have been many studies on media during the Civil War. These studies have been wide and varied, including how the war shaped the growth and development of nineteenth-century media. This is particularly true of the last few years as the importance of mid-nineteenth century media is becoming better understood and more valued. Authors such as Risley Ford, *Civil War Journalism* (2012), and David Sachsman, *A Press Divided: Newspaper Coverage of the Civil War* (2014), have effectively managed to shine a light on Northern and Southern media coverage, usage, and evolution. Traditional scholarship tends to view media as an object of the Civil War. As an object, it was acted upon and affected by the war. In this theoretical train of thought, the media can only be a recipient of change. What I aim to do is build on these traditional works, and others like them, in order to take it one step further.

While there are numerous studies on the impact the Civil War had on a burgeoning media, my research examines the flip-side of that. Instead, I want to investigate how media affected the Civil War's outcome. Deconstructing nineteenth-century media in this way will help convey its role as a change agent, and not merely a change recipient. By examining three battles in particular—Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg—and analyzing how they were covered throughout America by the Northern, Southern, and Western media, I hope to shed light on the

importance of media usage during the Civil War. I will argue that thanks to the clever and sometimes manipulative use of media, both the North and South used media to spin information. However, the North would prove to be more effective, and ultimately more likely to win the war, thanks in part to their more adept ability to spin information, their greater number of resources, and the government's willingness to control and censor communications. In other words, the sheer volume of Northern media gave it an inherently distinct advantage relative to the South.

In order to prove this point, I will employ a mixed-methods approach that errs on the side of qualitative. For my qualitative methodology, I will emphasize case studies using examples of newspapers, photography/illustrations, and telegraphy throughout the battles of Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg. For the quantitative approach, I will support my research with statistics to provide a clearer picture as it relates to soldiers, casualties, and media coverage.

My project will rely on the disciplines of history and media. The backdrop for my thesis is that of the Civil War and will cover the fighting, politics, and social and cultural issues of the time. The media component of my project will offer keen insights on how newspapers, photography, illustrations, and the telegraph grew and developed during this time period. Together, these subjects intersect at an interesting crossroad, pitting familiarity against unfamiliarity. On the one hand is the future of America hanging in the balance as it sways back and forth between Northern and Southern control through combat. On the other hand are the distinct media utilized during that period—one tool that in previous wars saw usage in some forms (newspapers), while seeing absolutely no usage in others (photography and the telegraph). Combined, this gave both parties, North and South, access to a new form of "weaponry" that could be used to aid their respective sides in battle.

As each battle I have researched will be tackled in chronological order, I will begin with Antietam before proceeding to Fredericksburg and Gettysburg. In addition to examining the media usage and technology involved in each battle, I will interweave a soldier's story into each chapter. The stories focus on a particular soldier who participated in one of the aforementioned battles. The intent in doing this is to take a more humanistic approach in assessing something as grandiose as the Civil War. When thinking about the Civil War, it is easier to view the fighting in macro terms: where there were winners and losers, an abundance of casualties, and large principles and ideologies at stake. What often becomes lost in this way of thinking are the individuals who fought in these battles. The purpose of their narratives in this thesis is to provide deeper context to each battle and to serve as a reminder of the individual costs of war.

By taking this approach, I hope to enhance the ability for readers to make a stronger, more empathetic connection to the Civil War and its participants. However, that is just one of the goals of this work. Again, through this research I plan to prove that the usage of media was essential to the North's ability to shape public opinion and morale, ultimately contributing to its winning war efforts.

Chapter One

Media at Antietam

Newton Manross joined the army as a thirty-seven-year-old professor, well-educated and lacking any prior military experience. He was similar to many Civil War soldiers who had never previously participated in blood-shedding battles. But as Manross described to his wife before enlisting in the Union army on July 22, 1862, "You can better afford to have a country without a husband than a husband without a country," (Gallagher, 1999: 170). One month later, Manross became captain of the Sixteenth Connecticut Regiment. Ill-prepared for what was to ensue, the Sixteenth Connecticut would find itself at the forefront in the Battle of Antietam.

Before entering that battlefield, Manross, one of nine children from Bristol, Connecticut, graduated from Yale in 1850 with a degree in geology. He traveled to Europe where he earned a Ph.D. and accepted a position as professor of chemistry and botany at Amherst College (Blakeslee, 1875: 20). Manross even received a patent in 1859 for his invention of a valve that slowed the flow of gasses (Manross, 1859). For this and his other works, Manross was frequently printed in the American Journal of Science.

When Manross and the rest of his regiment awoke on September 17, they prepared for battle. The Sixteenth Connecticut was part of a flanking maneuver by the Union in which they crossed Antietam Creek, well south of the action, hoping to surprise the rebels on their flank. The regiment's attack caught their counterparts off guard and was greeted with initial success, but after Confederate General A.P. Hill arrived with reinforcements, they trapped the inexperienced Sixteenth.

Like Manross, millions of other men decided to join the fighting, which lasted from April 1861 until April 1865. When combat began on April 12, 1861, with the bombing of Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, it set off four years of treacherous, blood-soaked combat. One could argue that most battles during the Civil War had extreme significance in how the war played out, but few were as pivotal as Antietam. At the time, the Battle of Antietam was the bloodiest in the nation's history. An estimated 22,717 casualties occurred at the historic battlefield near Sharpsburg, Maryland ("Antietam"). The 3,654 deaths have also since been surpassed only by a handful of battles from the Civil War and the World Wars. However, what happened on those hilly, rural fields from September 16 to 18, 1862, has long been remembered.

The Union troops arrived at Antietam reeling, desperately in search of a victory. General Robert E. Lee led his Southern soldiers into the face-off with a summer's worth of momentum after securing a victory at the Second Battle of Bull Run and a number of other, smaller skirmishes. Lee's army, making their first attempt at a Northern invasion, met General George McClellan at dawn on September 17 and commenced fighting. The battle waged on into the night; more lives were lost on that one day than any other day during the Civil War. After a full day of fighting, Lee's men were forced to retreat back to Virginia. Though the Union succeeded in pushing the rebels out of Northern territory and, more importantly, from reaching Washington D.C., the battle is widely considered a draw as the Union failed to land a serious blow to the Confederate army and suffered 2,000 more casualties than its counterpart ("Antietam"). However, desperately seeking any good news from his army, President Abraham Lincoln and his administration portrayed the battle as a Union victory and used it as the impetus for releasing the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22. The document stated that unless the rebellious

states rejoined the Union within one hundred days, all slaves within those still-rebelling states would be set free as of January 1, 1863 ("Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation").

The second ramification from this battle most often remembered is that it kept Britain and France from throwing their support behind the South. The two foreign countries had been monitoring the situation from afar and giving serious consideration to supporting the Confederate states. However, as I will explain in detail later, after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, no nation wanted to publicly back the Confederacy once the war also became a moral crusade in the public's perception ("The Significance of the Battle of Antietam"). While most contemporary writers focus on those two major consequences of what happened at Antietam, journalists at the time covered the battle with little analysis or prognostication the way Americans do today. They focused largely on the details, descriptions, and casualties of the battle. These were often reported incorrectly or with a bias, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that served as a means of supporting their side's position.

Northern Newspaper Coverage

In the North, newspaper usage exploded with the onset of the Civil War. One of the biggest papers at the time, the *New York Tribune*, boasted a strong circulation of 77,000 prior to the war. The day the first shots were fired on Fort Sumter, signaling the start of the war, the *Tribune*'s circulation ballooned to 107,520 copies and never fell below 100,000 for the remainder of the war (Jamison). Covering the Battle of Antietam, the *Tribune* focused on the literal fighting, rather than analyzing and speculating on the bigger picture. It describes, in the minutest of detail, the fourteen hours of combat from the positioning of regiments to the bullet holes passing through soldiers' bodies ("The Contest in Maryland"). While I will go on to argue that media was widely used to manufacture a Union victory, this reporting shows that many

media outlets and their reporters did aim to give an accurate depiction of war scenes, even when they injected their own opinions as this writer did in saying, "If not wholly a victory to-night, I believe it is the prelude to a victory tomorrow" ("The Contest in Maryland").

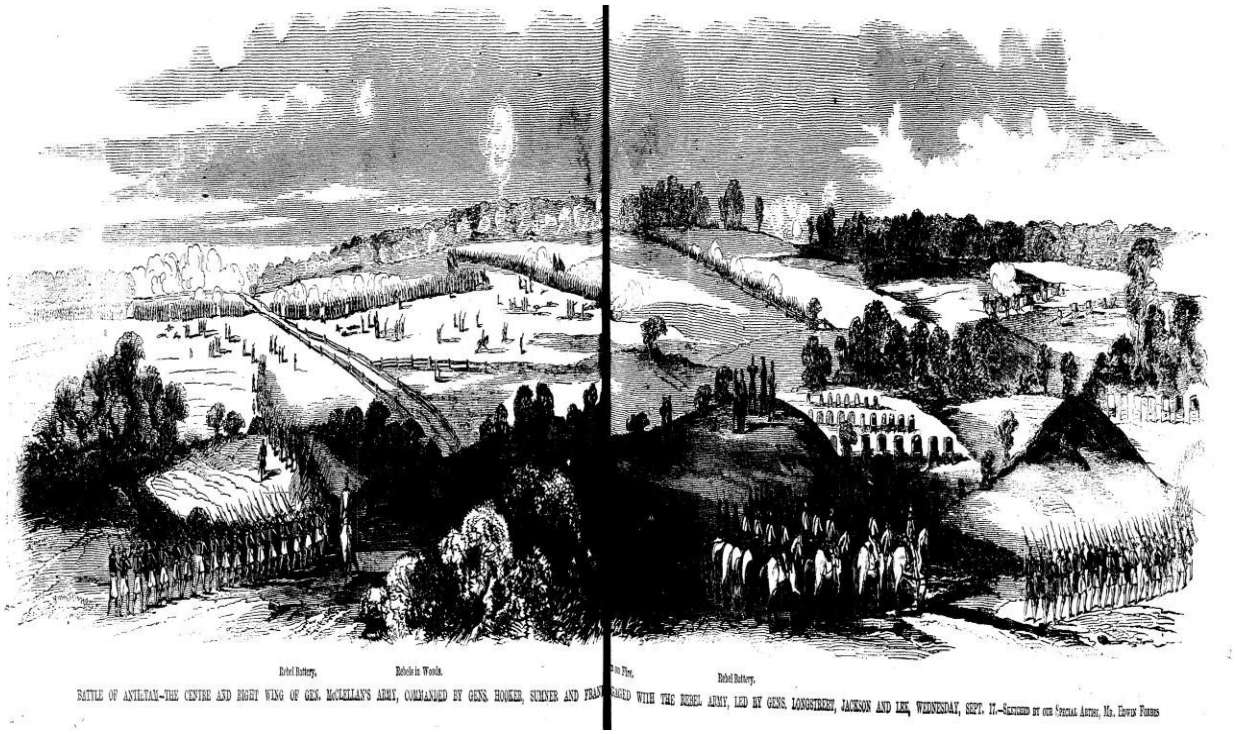
Other papers, though not as widely read as the *Tribune*, also had a tremendous effect on readers who thirsted for the latest news and developments. Most papers focused on the actual fighting and its resulting casualties. The *Daily National Intelligencer*, a Washington D.C. newspaper, gave a list of the killed, wounded, and missing from a trio of divisions within the Union army ("From Gen McClellan's Army"). The North and its newspapers, very much trying to persuade the public that their draw at Antietam was really a win, wrote about the success General McClellan had in driving Southern troops from Maryland. Casualty numbers were incorrectly reported in some Northern papers. Reports often boasted far greater damage had been done to the South, despite the reality that Northern casualties had been higher than those suffered by the Confederates ("Antietam"). The *Boston Daily Advertiser* claimed that despite carnage on both sides, the rebel army had suffered much greater losses than the Union ("Boston"). Maine's *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* also made the numbers appear to favor the North, reporting Southern wounded and killed to be upwards of 20,000, and the North at a mere 7,200 killed and wounded by comparison ("Telegraphic"). Whether the Northern papers deliberately reported the wrong information to make the Union appear victorious, or they simply had incorrect facts, the Northern public was much more likely to believe a successful battle had been won by their side. *The Evening Post* reinforced the idea of a dominating Union win, stating that the Northern troops had been in "high spirits at what they felt to be a substantial victory over the rebels," ("About the Battle of Antietam"). With so many newspapers reporting a resounding Union win, Northern civilians were even more apt to believe it. This type of reporting laid the groundwork for an

upbeat citizenry with a bevy of confidence. Whether well-founded or not, this confidence in their side's soldiers would serve Lincoln well when it came time to announce the Emancipation Proclamation.

One important issue to note was the political divide that existed among Northerners and their newspapers. The region was largely split between Republicans, or Lincoln supporters, and Democrats, who became better known as Copperheads. This term, given by Republican loyalists, was intended to be derogatory and refer to the poisonous snake; but the anti-war Democrats embraced the name with a different meaning. A penny was also known as a copperhead at the time, and "with an image of Lady Liberty on one side, the copperhead reinforced the Peace Democrats' insistence that they were resisting the president in defense of the Constitution and civil liberties" (Weber, 2011). As the vast majority of nineteenth century newspaper editors were involved in partisan politics, their newspapers reflected that. Republican and Democratic newspapers often flocked to the defense of their party's ideology and its representatives. Nineteenth-century newspapers had very little delineation between reporting news and editorializing. As such, Democratic papers often made personal attacks on Lincoln, chastised his administration, and made strong calls for an end to the war. However, this partisan conflict was not always prevalent during the immediate reporting of a battle's outcome. Once the outcome had been gleaned, then the Democratic newspapers either became quieter or more vociferous depending on the most recent battle's outcome and the tenor of the war. Certainly, the partisan nature of editors affected how their newspapers covered Lincoln and the war as a whole. With that said, the two sparring political sides were often aligned as Northerners who were hoping for good news when it came to initially reporting a battle's outcome.

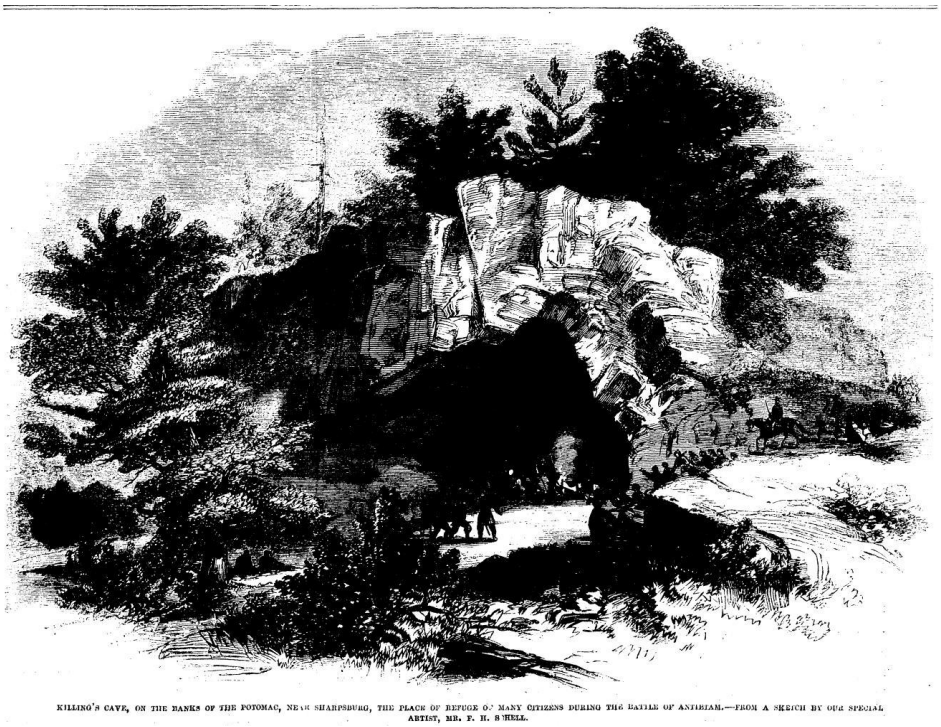
Visuals

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper was another paper, like the *Tribune*, with a circulation above 100,000 per week (Pearson, 1990). What made *Frank Leslie's* so different was its ability to bring the war to life through illustration. Photography at the time was in its early stages and illustrations were initially thought to be more interesting because they could tell multiple parts of a story at one time, whether they happened at the same time and place or not. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* brought its readers coverage of Antietam by covering both the battle itself and the surrounding civilians affected by the war. In a full-page illustration from October 11, 1862, artist Edwin Forbes depicted the two armies engaged in battle, from one edge of the page to the other. Union and Confederate troops were either marching to their positions or already exchanging fire (Forbes).



BATTLE OF ANTIETAM—THE CENTRE AND RIGHT WING OF GEN. McCLELLAN'S ARMY, COMMANDED BY GENS. HOOKER, SUMNER AND FRAN[illegible]AGED WITH THE REBEL ARMY, LED BY GENS. LONGSTREET, JACKSON AND LEE, WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 17.—SKETCHED BY OUR SPECIAL ARTIST, MR. EDWIN FORBES

Another illustration showed the other unfortunate side of the war involving non-combatants caught in Sharpsburg during the battle. These people sought refuge in Killings Cave, on the bank of the Potomac (Schell).



KILLING'S CAVE, ON THE BANKS OF THE POTOMAC, NEAR SHARPSBURG, THE PLACE OF REFUGE OF MANY CITIZENS DURING THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM.—FROM A SKETCH BY OUR SPECIAL ARTIST, MR. F. H. SCHELL.

Scenes like these were often portrayed, allowing the general public to "see" the fighting even if they did not reside in the fight's location, or if they were illiterate and unable to read the daily reports. The illustrations provided readers with a visual image that allowed for a stronger emotional connection than simply reading reports on the fighting could offer. They also often served as a means of political propaganda, according to journalism historian Ford Risley:

> A picture in a summer 1862 issue of *Harper's* captured the "Sacking of a City in the West by the Guerillas." It showed a highly stylized street scene with Confederate guerillas wrecking a town. In the foreground, a woman on her knees pleaded with a rebel guerilla, while an old man was about to be beaten over the head by another soldier. The accompanying text said: "Guerilla warfare involves, as a matter of necessity, the four highest crimes in the calendar—murder, rape, robbery, and arson. The bond which unites members of a guerilla band together is love of plunder, lust, and violence. War, as carried

> out by civilized armies, has no attraction for them. It would not pay them." Another illustration showed Union prisoners being marched through a Southern town. Angry townspeople, including women and children, expressed hatred for the troops. (44)

("John Morgan's Raid," 1862)

Using illustrations in order to propagate a standard set of beliefs perpetuated the idea that Southerners were vicious, Yankee-hating barbarians, lacking in morals and conscience. This fed into the idea that Confederates were evil and gave the North yet another reason to band together against the enemy.

Though photography was not widely used throughout the Civil War, Antietam was one of the few instances in which coverage of the war through pictures gained widespread attention for its ability to bring previously-envisioned bloodbaths into a stark and ugly reality. Mathew Brady and his two assistants, James Gibson and Alexander Gardner, took some of the most memorable photographs from the war after arriving at Sharpsburg. Among the best known photos taken at Antietam are those of a Union burial party and dead Confederates lined up in what is now known

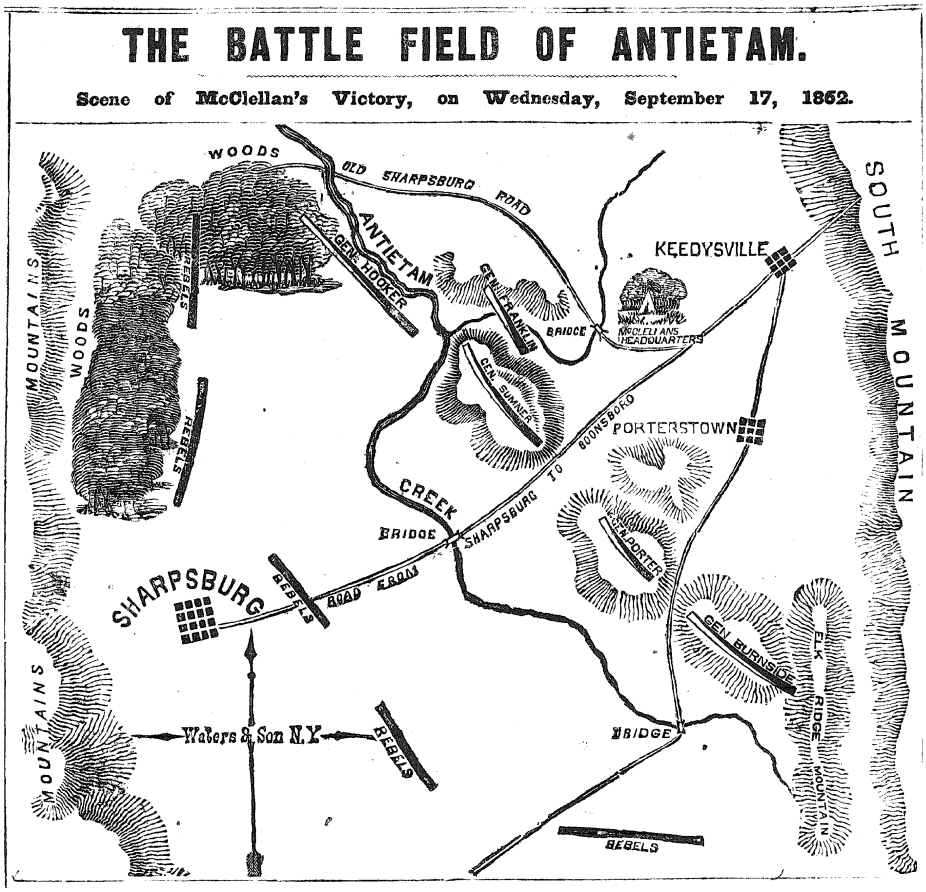
as “Bloody Lane,” an old, sunken dirt path used for transportation. Extremely graphic in nature, these photos showed the gruesome reality of war—mangled faces, contorted limbs, and the lifeless bodies that remained piled on top of each other. Photos like these were horrific, but they were also praised. Though Gibson and Gardner were the ones who took the Antietam pictures, Brady was largely given the credit (Risley, 2012: 43). As the *New York Times* reported, “Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets, he has done something very like it” (“Brady’s Photographs”).

Numerous bodies lie dead in Antietam’s wake, piled atop one another in an old, sunken road, which has come to be known as “Bloody Lane.”

The grisly photographs had served their purpose. Unlike the illustrations that captivated much of the nation, the photographs at Antietam captured the deceased in a way the artist’s renderings could not. Unlike illustrations, which were the representation of one person’s mental

image, photographs were a literal representation of the battle's consequences. These images, gory and disturbing as they were, reinforced the importance of what the country was fighting for. For the North, they were fighting for the unity of a nation and the chance to abolish slavery, or at least stop its spread, and the pictures of the dead were a reminder to not let their efforts, and soldiers' lives, go to waste.

The battlefield map was another popular visual aid often provided to the public by newspapers. The use of maps allowed citizens to get a sense of where troops were located relative to the enemy. Maps also allowed for a better understanding of important landmarks such as bodies of water, forests, and hills. They were a simple way of providing more perspective for readers who had no knowledge of the land.



(*The Civil War: A Newspaper Perspective*. Image 317, 1999.)

Southern Newspaper Coverage

Not surprisingly, Southern newspapers wrote about the Battle of Antietam in a different manner. The *Richmond Inquirer* called numerous Northern reports on the battle "silly fabrications" ("Latest From the North"). Another Virginia paper, the *Alexandria Gazette*, proclaimed the battle a Confederate victory and morale boost for future fighting ("The Position"). The battle was seen as more of a win or possible draw than it was an unquestioned Federal triumph. Similarly to the North, the South did this to drum up support and increase confidence for their side during wartime. The *Alexandria Gazette* admitted that General McClellan's army was in less trouble than originally thought by the South, but continued to stay upbeat, focusing on the valiant troop efforts as the new regiments "vied with the old" ("The Position"). The Southern media at this time tried its best to shift the narrative, but with the Rebel army retreating to Virginia, it was much harder to sell a Confederate victory than for Union media members who could argue that the North stood their ground without budging.

Most papers in the South, particularly the Deep South, relied on the reporting of papers much closer to Maryland for their information. Whether it was Northern or Southern articles, Northern or Southern Associated Press reports, or dispatches from the armies themselves, papers like the *Macon Daily Telegraph* (Georgia), the *Charleston Mercury* (South Carolina), *The Daily Picayune* (Louisiana), and many others shared much of the same information. Due to a lack of information, areas away from the battle may not have had a great depth of timely material provided. However, through shared communications and reprinting of other articles, the same general knowledge could be passed along in varying locations.

The Associated Press played a vital role in disseminating information for both sides, but particularly for the South, where a dearth of sustainable newspapers made it difficult to provide

news to the public. Southern newspapers, which had once relied on these AP reports to be transmitted via telegraph, had their lines of communication severed shortly after the war began. In response, William Pritchard, editor of the *Augusta Constitutionalist*, attempted to form a Southern Associated Press (Risley, 2001). The Southern AP existed for nearly two years with mostly unproductive results. The Confederacy's news gathering agency had yielded high costs, low quality, and a penchant for slowly arriving news. Confederate newspaper editors were fed up by March 1863 and formed the Press Association of the Confederate States of America. Editors from a number of Confederate newspapers convened in Augusta, Georgia, and elected R.W. Gibbes as president and John Thrasher as superintendant (Risley, 2001). The newly formed Press Association, though not perfect, was an improvement on the previous system. Thrasher's calls for reporters to be accurate, timely, and abstain from editorializing helped raise the bar for Southern journalism and became a more reliable resource for Southern citizens than the Southern AP had been. However, as the war waged on, the South struggled to produce the man power, newspapers, and telegraphic wiring needed to adequately report the news. They began relying almost exclusively on Northern reports during the war's final year. By 1865, the Press Association was struggling to survive and as the war ended so, too, did the South's news gathering organization. Although Southern editors were not entirely successful in their efforts to provide a reliable system of reporting to their citizens, they did manage to create a network and spread some information in an era when timely news was at a premium.

Western Newspaper Coverage

Many papers too far away from the battle and dependent upon outside help were Western newspapers. Thousands of miles away from the chaos and destruction in the East, citizens cared a great deal about receiving updates from across the United States. The West took great interest

in the war because many still had friends and family back East, either participating directly in the war or feeling its effects indirectly. These folks gathered information from various papers, including the *Morning Oregonian* (Oregon) and the *Daily Evening Bulletin* (California). The *Bulletin* covered Antietam by combining General McClellan dispatches and *New York Tribune* reporting with their own gleanings from the war's assorted information they had received. The paper declared a Union victory at Antietam, but noted, "It looks as though McClellan might have made a better use of Thursday, and done more damage" instead of allowing General Lee and his men to retreat across the Potomac in the night ("The Situation on the Potomac"). While occasionally drawing conclusions on the knowledge they had, Western papers tended to stick to reporting selectively from the batch of dispatches they received from the battlefield. Because the West typically gathered information from this battle via correspondents in the North, they were more likely to present their citizens with the viewpoints of the North, namely that Antietam had been a resounding win.

The Telegraph

Selling the West on this notion of a Northern victory at Antietam came in large part with the help of the telegraph. The telegraph had been conceived and built by Samuel Morse in the 1830s and 1840s, with the first message being sent in 1844. When the war began in 1861, the telegraph was still widely under-used and under-appreciated. Lincoln, however, took an immediate interest in the new technology and saw it as a way to connect with his generals on the battlefield. With his advocacy, the North would go on to be far more connected via telegraph lines than the South. This allowed Lincoln to impose his leadership in a way never before done by other leaders (Wheeler, 2006). Lincoln embraced the telegraph as a way to lead from afar, receiving almost instant updates regarding battles, army movements, and the general state of

Union troops. As a result of Lincoln's desire to expand the communication system, the North had a decided advantage in communication via telegrams. According to historian Tom Wheeler, the Northern-operated United States Military Telegraph Corps "constructed and operated about 15,000 new miles of telegraph lines during the hostilities," while the "Confederates were able to construct fewer than 500 miles of new lines" (Wheeler, 2006: 42). Part of the reason for this disparity was that the South lacked the industrial capabilities to produce the materials—battery acid, glass insulators, and wire—needed to produce telegraph lines in higher quantities. The other reason for the relatively small number of telegraph wires stemmed from a lack of fundamental belief in the system itself. Southern President Jefferson Davis, like most Southerners, did not believe in the type of centralized authority needed to construct and conduct widespread telegraph implementation. This meant that their communication would lag behind the North. It also meant that Western access to information would come largely from Northern telegraph lines, which were likely to offer a pro-Northern point of view when relaying information from battlefields such as Antietam. Thus, folks west of the Mississippi River were more likely to think of Antietam as a successful engagement and buy into Lincoln's unprecedented next move.

With the North claiming a victory at Antietam, Lincoln seized the opportunity to publicly release the Emancipation Proclamation. A great stir arose from every corner of the nation with this news. Many papers predicted emancipation as a possibility if the Union won the Civil War, but when the official announcement about plans to free the slaves landed, the press reacted vociferously. In the North, papers predicted "renewed confidence" and "higher hopes" of returning to the proper way of life after war's end ("Emancipation Proclamation"). They said it

was “hailed with the most joyful enthusiasm” (*New York Tribune*). Northerners delighted in the Emancipation news. They saw it as a blow to the South and a unifying force for themselves.

In the South, the proclamation was viewed as an order that would make Confederate states fight, more determined than ever, to forever separate from the North (“Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation”). Tennessee congressional member A.R. Nelson was reported in *The Hinds County Gazette* to have called it the “most outrageous act of usurpation ever contemplated in Europe or America” (“Editorial”). In African-American communities, the Proclamation elicited happiness and celebration at the progress made. Frederick Douglass, an abolitionist and former slave, declared, “We shout for joy that we live to record this righteous decree” (quoted in Holzer, 2010). As the emancipation became official January 1, 1863, black people were ordered free in rebelling states. Even though the rebel states did not actually free their slaves, the proclamation symbolized an enormous rallying cry and sign of progress for Northern supporters. The Emancipation Proclamation also authorized the use of black soldiers by the Northern military. About 186,000 African-American men had enlisted by the time war ended in 1865 (“The Civil War”).

Regardless of one’s color or locale, the Emancipation Proclamation became the talk of the day, and it was the Antietam “victory” that allowed it to happen when it did. In it, Northerners saw a morale swing in their favor. They had put so much effort, and so many lives, into Antietam that the announcement helped to rejuvenate and reinforce their determination to win the war. Antietam’s effect goes even deeper than this, however.

The Union’s self-proclaimed “victory” at Antietam allowed Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation when he did. The president had been considering Emancipation throughout the first half of 1862 and resolved to forge ahead with his plan in July. At the behest

of Secretary of State William Seward, Lincoln decided to withhold his announcement until a Union victory had been achieved, lest the announcement look like "the last measure of an exhausted government, a cry for help…our last shriek, on the retreat" (Carpenter, 1866: 22). As the Union struggled that summer, Lincoln anxiously awaited a glimmer of hope that would allow for the announcement of his Emancipation plan. Antietam was just that glimmer of hope Lincoln had been looking for, and on September 22, 1862, he announced the Emancipation Proclamation. Had the Proclamation not been issued when it was, it is conceivable that a foreign power would have sided with President Davis and the Confederate states. The aristocratic governments of Britain and France could more readily identify with the class system inherent in the South's social structure. Having a more relatable class system favored the South in terms of gaining military support and aid. Though Europe generally detested slavery by the mid-nineteenth century, until the Emancipation Proclamation, the war had been about preserving an unstable union, not ending slavery. That did not deter some in the media from guessing what might happen after the Proclamation was issued. When the *London Times* first wrote about the United States' new Proclamation, the outrage was expressed over the fact that neither Lincoln nor Congress had the Constitutional right, they thought, to impose laws on a group of seceded states ("Later News From Europe").

After the Union defeat at the Second Battle of Bull Run in late August 1862, many thought it was a foregone conclusion that Britain would intervene. Prime Minister Viscount Palmerston and former Prime Minister Lord John Russell both thought Union success was hopeless and wanted to act as a mediator in peace talks that would result in a separation of state (Jones, 2010: 215-6). Their idea was to stay neutral if the Union agreed to peace talks, but if not, Britain was prepared to recognize and support the Confederacy (Jones, 2010: 218). Palmerston

and Russell both believed the Union was on the verge of folding. They thought Britain could present itself as neutral while helping end the bloodshed and quietly providing the South with the detachment from the Union it desperately wanted. By doing this, Britain would improve its image to the rest of the world by acting as a peace broker, make the United States weaker as a world power, and establish a strong economic relationship with the cotton-providing South. Lincoln and the Union, though, found European neutrality offensive (Jones, 2010: 218). In Lincoln's opinion, any European attempt to mediate the war's end was recognition of the South's legitimacy and was unacceptable. Hearing that a battle in Sharpsburg, Maryland, was ready to occur, Britain decided to wait for it to play out, assuming another Confederate victory would push the Union closer to the negotiating table.

When that did not happen, and Lincoln used the opportunity to publish the Emancipation Proclamation, the foreign governments and their media were taken aback. Many of them lambasted Lincoln. Not because they all believed in the institution of slavery, but because they saw it as more of a military tactic than an ideological belief; as a president overstepping his authority; as someone inciting further fighting and rebellion, despite the horrifying number of casualties already incurred. The *London Times* accused Lincoln of trying to stir Southern uprisings in which blacks would murder their owners' families. London's *Bee-Hive* pointed out Lincoln's refusal to end slavery in the Border States where he had authority, while attempting to end slavery in Southern states where his authority did not exist. Even the *Spectator*, a pro-Union paper in London, found the Proclamation conflicting in that Lincoln was essentially saying it was all right to own slaves, but only if done so as part of the United States (Jones, 2010: 232). Many French newspapers held the Proclamation in the same regard. Despite much of the foreign criticism, Lincoln knew that the attempt to abolish slavery would shift the war's narrative to "a

humanitarian effort and thereby undermine European sympathy for southerners as an oppressed people who deserved outside intervention" (Jones, 2010: 230). It did not matter if foreign governments or their media agreed with Lincoln's course of action, any hypocrisy involved, or the feasibility of enacting legal measures in states he did not control. Lincoln understood that any country wishing to support the South in the future would also be forced to openly support slavery as an institution.

In some instances, the South still suspected the North's attempt to make the Civil War an issue of race would strengthen foreign support for the Confederacy. The assumption was that powers like Britain and France would be disgusted by this Union tactic to garner support, and it would backfire on them ("Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation"). While many were appalled by Lincoln's decree, Southern hopes and assumptions never came to fruition as Europe stayed out of the war altogether. With their nations' people vehemently opposed to the idea of supporting a country fighting a war over slavery, Britain and France could not afford to play politics and side against the nation wanting to destroy slavery ("Europe and the American Civil War," 2002).

Britain and France staying out of the war stemmed from the purported success at Antietam. Without the Union's draw at Antietam, the Northern media's ability to sell the battle as a win, and Lincoln's decision that Antietam had been successful enough to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, it is feasible that Britain and France would have soon followed with their support of the South and made Union victory much more unlikely.

Now trapped by Confederate forces, the Sixteenth Connecticut was in a bind. Their inexperience and lack of cohesion was exploited. The untrained soldiers stood little chance. They had gone into battle with 940 men, but left with just 508 after 432 of them had been killed,

wounded, captured, or gone missing (Blakeslee, 1875). Manross was struck by a cannonball in his left side during the battle, a wound that killed him.

Newton Manross was just one of the 22,717 casualties during the Battle of Antietam. This battle is often remembered as having the highest one-day casualty total in American history. It is also remembered thanks to the ability of the Union to stop the Confederates from successfully invading the North and the Emancipation Proclamation that was issued after the brief battle concluded. In this case, the Battle of Antietam also has meaning because of how the media helped shape its outcome. While both sides tried to manipulate the truth about such an even battle, it was the North, with their more abundant coverage and their greater interconnectivity with the West, which helped sell the notion of Northern success. What would have otherwise been a draw by many accounts turned into a Union victory with the help of newspapers, photography, and the telegraph. In essence, these various mediums secured a win for the North at the Battle of Antietam and went a long way toward achieving Union victory in the Civil War.

Chapter Two

Media at Fredericksburg

Nathaniel Renfroe, nearly 27 years old at the time, enlisted in the Confederate army four months after the war began. Lacking any prior military experience, Renfroe joined the Fifth Alabama Battalion. Like most Civil War soldiers who had yet to participate in any kind of bloodletting, Renfroe fought in defense of his loved ones and country. As he described in a letter to his older brother, John, "I have entered the army to fight for you, and, if need be, to die for you and yours." Renfroe was promoted to Lieutenant after four months of fighting (Renfroe, 2000: 5). Always prepared for the worst, Renfroe found himself in a treacherous situation at the Battle of Fredericksburg.

Renfroe grew up poor and illiterate as a child, but by the age of 15 devoted himself to the church, becoming a licensed preacher shortly thereafter. In the summer of 1862, Renfroe fell ill and was forced to leave his regiment. However, when a series of battles began near Richmond, Virginia, he returned to fight despite his doctor's orders. Renfroe's participation while in a weakened state contributed to his developing typhoid fever, which knocked him out of commission for a few months as he missed the battles of Cedar Mountain, Second Bull Run, and Antietam (Renfroe, 2000: 6). Once he returned to health, Renfroe made himself ready for Fredericksburg. Though in control for much of the battle, the Confederate right side was briefly broken by the Union. On the extreme right of this skirmish, the Fifth Alabama saw this opening in the Confederate defense and, led by Renfroe, rushed into the fray against overwhelming odds (Martin, 2000).

By December 1862, the Union army was still struggling to find its stride. Despite the positive momentum that had resulted from Antietam and the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation, President Abraham Lincoln remained unsatisfied at what had been a less-than-impressive 1862 campaign. It was a year that had seen heavy losses at Shiloh and Second Bull Run, while also being on the losing end of many smaller skirmishes. Lincoln was further disgruntled by the lack of aggression shown from his army leaders. Weary of General George McClellan's reticent, defensive nature, Lincoln chose to go in a different direction and sought to replace the leader of the Army of the Potomac who had been in charge since General Winfield Scott retired in November 1861.

On November 7, Ambrose Burnside reluctantly agreed to take command of the Army of the Potomac after having previously refused the promotion. He wanted McClellan, his close friend, to stay in charge but after being informed that Major General Joseph Hooker would be handed the reins if Burnside continued to decline the offer, he relented (Goolrick, 1985: 24). Burnside disliked Hooker and was willing to take charge if it prevented Hooker from taking command. Once in control, Burnside declared his objective to capture Richmond, believing that should be the "great object of the campaign." Burnside believed that the fall of the Confederate capital would "tend more to cripple the rebel cause than almost any other military event." Fredericksburg provided the "shortest road to Richmond," as it was the midpoint between Washington and Richmond (O'Reilly, 2003: 21). Lincoln and Halleck "tried to dissuade Burnside from going to Fredericksburg at all" because Lincoln wanted Burnside to force Lee to either fight or retreat from Culpeper, Virginia, where the Southern General was located at the time (O'Reilly, 2003: 23). Burnside chose to ignore the president's advice and carried out his planned march to Fredericksburg. Fighting began on December 11 while the Union was building

a bridge to cross the river. At 5:10 a.m., Captain Wesley Brainerd was able to identify Confederate troops watching their movements, loading their rifles, and waiting for the right moment to strike. “What I saw almost chilled my blood,” Brainerd said (O’Reilly, 2003: 65).

It was not long before chilled blood turned to spilled blood. The Battle of Fredericksburg lasted five days and saw Northern troops dismantled by Confederate forces. The Union suffered 12,653 killed, wounded, or missing at Fredericksburg compared to 5,309 casualties for the rebels (Holzer, 2010: 204). It was a devastating defeat for the North. Yet, many Northerners—politicians, media, and citizens—did their best to view the situation with optimism. William Stoddard, Lincoln’s assistant secretary, represented the mentality of many Northerners as he admitted defeat at Fredericksburg but remained resolute in the Union’s ability to ultimately succeed:

> If the same battle were to be fought over again, every day, through a week of days, with the same relative results, the army under Lee would be wiped out to its last man, the Army of the Potomac would still be a mighty host, the war would be over, the Confederacy gone, and peace would be won at a smaller cost of life than it will be if the week of lost battles must be dragged out through yet another year of camps and marches, and of deaths in hospitals rather than upon the field. (xv)

While the North saw its fair share of discontent given the disappointing results at Fredericksburg, Stoddard, and others like him, helped soothe rising fears with their ability to portray the situation in a positive light. Although the nearly 18,000 casualties at the Battle of Fredericksburg do not rank near the top of the Civil War’s bloodiest battles, many studies show that what happened in that city has long been remembered.

In retrospect, Fredericksburg is often remembered by historians for a few reasons in particular. Though the North was coming off a widely perceived victory at Antietam, the summer

had still been rough on the Union army, and confidence in the North had been waning. This, along with McClellan's inability to follow Lee's army and inflict further punishment after Antietam, heightened the need for a follow-up victory at Fredericksburg. However, that did not happen, as the South defended their position, crushing the North in their attempted invasion. Fredericksburg is widely considered one of the biggest Southern victories during the Civil War. Prior to the fight, Lieutenant General James Longstreet told his First Corps, "Let every man of us summon all his spirit and all his strength to this encounter," anticipating that "if we beat our foe in this engagement, the war may terminate with it" (O'Reilly, 2003: 435). Although the Confederates did not end the war with this engagement, Northern troops were massacred in waves with thousands being killed during the battle. With mangled bodies and detached limbs strewn about, there was a "two-acre area at Fredericksburg containing 1,350 dead Yankees" (Faust, 2008: 58). While there were many battles that saw more Union deaths accrued in total, there were few that felt as pointless as Fredericksburg. Upon witnessing the fighting, Union General Oliver O. Howard wrote, "I had never before seen fighting like that, nothing approached it in terrible uproar and destruction," as each successive brigade "would do its duty and melt like snow coming down on warm ground" (O'Reilly, 2003: 274). Despite the overwhelming victory, Lee and Longstreet both left feeling a little disappointed in the results. They believed Fredericksburg was one of their most "fruitless victories," along with Second Manassas, known in the North as the Second Battle of Bull Run, because of the time and resources used to secure victory. (O'Reilly, 2003: 497). In their estimation, the battle had drained Southern forces in ways that such a decisive victory should not have.

Although Southern leaders had a few residual concerns about the battle's effects, they paled in comparison to concerns in the North. At this time, morale in the North was reaching

unprecedented lows as many people began to question their chances to win and, more specifically, the intelligence and aptitude of their leaders. On December 21, 1862, a majority of Republican senators pressed Lincoln to reshuffle his cabinet, starting with the dismissal of Secretary of State William Seward. Lincoln deftly responded by suggesting the senators confront Seward themselves if they had any concerns, which they refused to do. Lincoln then refused to accept Seward's proffered resignation (Holzer, 2010: 204). Seward understood the pressure Lincoln was facing and was willing to sacrifice himself for the benefit of Lincoln's war efforts. Fortunately for Seward, Lincoln recognized the problem was not with his cabinet as much as it was with his field generals. In continuing to meet with political leaders in the days and weeks following Fredericksburg, Lincoln met with Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin. The governor had just visited the battlefield when he convened with Lincoln and described a wretched picture, telling the president "it was not a battle, it was a butchery" (Goolrick, 1985: 92-3). Lincoln now knew the grim truth as well as anyone. As one New York soldier recalled, "The 11th was a day of bombardment such as even the soldiers rarely see" (O'Reilly, 2003: 68). December 11 was also a monumental day as it saw the first ever known street fighting in North America, destroying the town of Fredericksburg, and setting the stage for the way modern armies would fight going forward (O'Reilly, 2003: 101). Cities like Fredericksburg that encountered fighting would be pillaged and ransacked in order to take away supplies, homes, and oppositional morale moving forward.

There was plenty of disdain among Union soldiers at how the orders were given, essentially ensuring the deaths of many. This was evident from some Northerners who willingly put themselves in harm's way, becoming easy targets to mow down for Confederate forces (O'Reilly, 2003: 69). A number of soldiers were so aware of their likely deaths that they seemed

to intentionally make their killings easier for the enemy. This all happened despite the fact that the Union's 120,000 men far outnumbered the South's 40,000 (O'Reilly, 2003: 37). Coupled with a failed second offensive, now known as the "Mud March," where torrential rains thwarted his plans for another attack, Burnside would be relieved of his command in favor of Hooker. The Union army's initial demoralization after the loss at Fredericksburg dissipated during their winter respite with the help of Hooker, whose command "improved rations and medical care." When the troops broke camp in late April, "one veteran recalled, 'the discipline and morale of the army were about perfect.'" Another soldier agreed they "were once more ready to fight" (Goolrick, 1985: 112).

Northern Newspaper Coverage

While rest and the presence of Hooker helped restore the energy and spirit of Union troops, the Northern media did its part to assuage civilian concerns and provide a more optimistic outlook. On both sides, newspaper usage exploded with the onset of the Civil War. The North, however, had a decided advantage in terms of resources and circulation. Prior to the war, "newspaper circulation per capita had been 3.7 times higher in the North than in the South in 1860." This disparity only grew throughout the Civil War and "by 1870, circulation per capita in the North was 5.5 times greater than in the South" (Starr, 2004: 145). Virtually all newspapers saw an uptick in demand as they often presented the quickest and most viable means of communication with the war's frontlines. These papers often featured thorough reporting that centered on details, almost to an excruciating extent. For example, in the *New York Times* coverage of Fredericksburg, plenty of details appear in a report written on Saturday, December 13, which was published Monday, December 15. Some reporting includes: "the morning opened with a dense fog," the Union troops, led by General Reynolds' corps advanced at 9:15 a.m. and

"engaged the enemy's infantry. Seven minutes afterward the rebels opened a heavy fire of artillery." There are many mentions of the time of day, direction of troop movements, little speculation on losses accrued, and descriptions of how the city "suffered terribly" (Holzer, 2010: 204). Although I will go on to argue that the media was widely used to construct a narrative of their side's success, this example is a reminder to show that many journalists were not necessarily trying to spin war news in their side's favor. They tried to present the truth and offer facts, even if they could not completely withhold their bias as was the case in this *New York Times* report, which ended with a glimmer of hope. According to the article, "…as hard as the rebels had tried to drive Union troops out, their efforts had been 'without success'" (Holzer, 2010: 204).

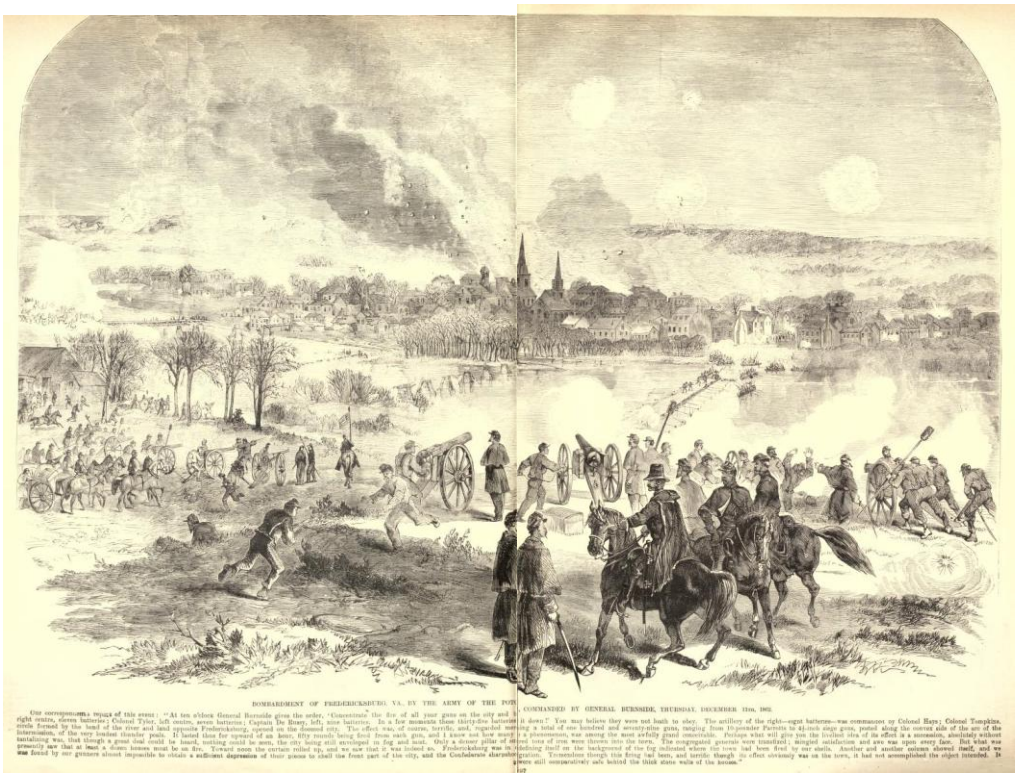
Many papers, of course, were much more openly biased in their reporting. A December 16 report by *The Daily Cleveland Herald* offered hope for its readers. Despite the fact that the estimated loss for the Union had surpassed 5,000 at the time, the paper put a positive spin on the situation saying that perhaps there was a method to Burnside's lack of movement, suggesting that he was waiting for a movement from troops just south of Richmond. The paper urged readers to "keep their patience" ("News of the Day"). *The Daily Cleveland Herald* showed continued support and belief in the Union's military leaders and went out of its way to calm readers who might question the Union's ability to prevail. The *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* put an extremely positive spin on Fredericksburg and the future, bordering on delusion. "Upon receiving the news that our troops had occupied Fredericksburg, the President is said to have remarked—'The rebellion is now virtually at an end,' and to have added a prophesy that Richmond would be in possession of the Union troops before the 1st of January" ("Upon receiving the news"). Whether or not Lincoln actually made that claim, the newspaper chose to

publish it and stand behind the message despite the crushing defeat. Sometimes misinformation, or unequivocal lies, proved to be even more effective at breeding confidence. For example, take the *Boston Investigator*'s declaration that the North had captured Fredericksburg. "Gen. Burnside's army have crossed the Rappahannock and captured Fredericksburg, after a long and hard fight." They went on to paint a very bleak picture for the South. "We believe Jefferson Davis is getting tired of the war, as well as the Southern people generally, and a few more well directed blows at the rebels will bring them to terms" ("General Intelligence"). Despite the *Investigator*'s claims of unmitigated triumph at Fredericksburg turning out to be wholly untrue, the boost of confidence and positivity had been instilled. Regardless of the intentions of Northern reporters to deliberately report incorrect information or simply fall victim to sloppy and careless reporting, these initial reports were much more likely to convince the Northern public that a successful battle had been won by their side.

Not all papers wore blinders, however. Some, like the *Daily National Intelligencer*, were willing to admit defeat at Fredericksburg and had a hard time disguising their dour feelings. "No one would be gladder to reflect the bright sides of the situation and prospect of the Army of the Potomac than myself; yet a sense of truth compels me to state that it's not by any means encouraging" ("The Army of the Potomac"). Yet, for any given newspaper that was willing to play the role of pessimist, or even realist in this case, there was plenty of news coverage ready to provide encouragement. After the Union's loss at Fredericksburg, the *Morning Chronicle* insisted that, "We are wrong at looking at the affair at Fredericksburg as an overwhelming disaster. It is simply a temporary defeat" (Risley, 2012: 73). To them, the loss was nothing more than a slight inconvenience on the road to certain victory.

Visuals

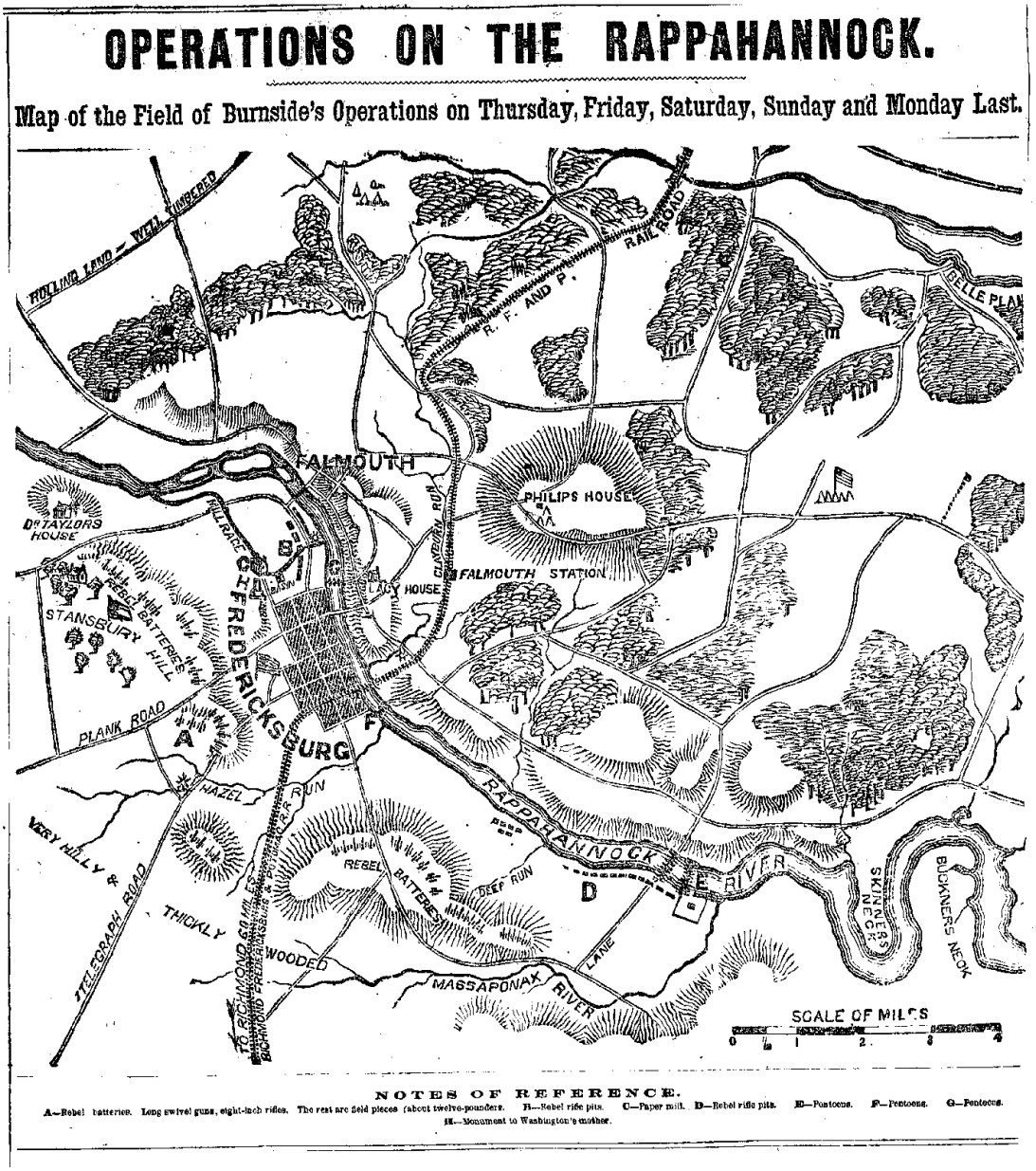
Civilians seeking visual aids at Fredericksburg relied heavily on illustrations. What helped make *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* so popular was the ability to bring the war to life through expansive drawings. Although photography had made a break-through with its usage at Antietam, the art was still in its infancy and many readers preferred the more classic use of illustrations. Whereas a photograph could only capture the content within the camera's frame, illustrations could provide a much wider view of the situation. Illustrators were not bound by a lens, only their imaginations. In one illustration, both armies can be seen frantically moving around as the fighting raged on. The Rappahannock River separated them as some remnants of fog and smoke engulfed the city of Fredericksburg in the background (Leslie and Moat, 1895). With a myriad of finer points included from side-to-side, illustrations allowed readers to visualize the details and experience battles as if they were present.



The other major illustration-based paper at the time was *Harper's Weekly*. Like *Frank Leslie's*, it emphasized illustrations as the most effective way to depict the entirety of a battle. In a January 13, 1863, edition of *Harper's Weekly*, the paper not only lionized Union forces who made a charge at Fredericksburg but also played the role of propagandist. It made little mention of the battle's results, choosing to focus on the North's valiant efforts and the South's horrifying murders. Speaking of the rebel soldiers, *Harper's Weekly* wrote: "The murderous traitors, without remorse, shot down all who approached. Men with children dependent on them —men whose wives trembled for them—men who had been little children, and whose mothers would have feared to have a cold wind blow on them—there they lay" ("The Battle of Fredericksburg"). Slyly, they avoid discussing the Union defeat or the potential ineptitude of its leaders in favor of casting the South as murderous villains, implicitly meant to rile up the collective Northern psyche to ensure they would view Southerners as vicious killers rather than soldiers at war.

GALLANT CHARGE OF HUMPHREY'S DIVISION AT THE BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG.—SKETCHED BY MR. A. E. WALL.—[SEE PAGE 17.]

Just as at Antietam, the battlefield map proved to be a simple, yet beneficial, way to convey the terrain troops dealt with. At Fredericksburg, maps offered a better understanding of the war's first urban combat. The location of troops relative to the city, its outer limits, and natural landmarks would have been of great interest to civilians unfamiliar with the territory.



(*The Civil War: A Newspaper Perspective*. Image 369, 1999)

Photography at Fredericksburg did not have quite the same resonance as it did at Antietam. When pictures of the dead at Antietam were first brought to light, the public's shock and outcry were immense. It would have been nearly impossible to match the mystification and cultural significance produced by Antietam's photographs. However, the jarring images from that battle piqued curiosity going forward, giving photography more legitimacy as a respected medium. Although moving photographs were not possible at this time, the still images photographers provided were more than palatable to the nation's desires. This increased the importance of photographers such as Mathew Brady and Alexander Gardner, both of whom were household names by the war's end. Though few photographs exist from the original Battle at Fredericksburg, readers were becoming more intrigued by the literal representation of a photograph rather than an illustration, which was a representation of one person's mental image.

The view of Fredericksburg from across the Rappahannock River. ("View of Fredericksburg, VA")

The Telegraph

Unlike the photograph, the evolution of the telegraph played a critical role at Fredericksburg. Use of the telegraph significantly cut down the amount of time it took for the news to reach cities spread out across the country. What once took days or even weeks could now be made public knowledge in a matter of hours. The first and most basic function it held was transmitting news of the battle around the country. Many papers, like the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, would specify the segments of their reporting obtained via telegraph. News of Burnside's retreat was initially received by telegraph and came as a bit of a shock to the North. The messages initially received conveyed "the somewhat startling intelligence of the withdrawal of General Burnside's whole force to this side of the Rappahannock." Despite the surprise, the paper defended the army's actions, stating that the rebels were not inclined to "leave their strongholds to meet our troops in an open field." The paper also tried to reassure the public that although their losses were significant, it was certainly far below some of the reports that had been published ("By Telegraph").

Government interference could also play a role in the dissemination of news and its timeliness. According to historian Ford Risley, many newspapers complained about government censoring after Fredericksburg as telegraph wires were nearly impossible to use at first.

> News of the Federal army's disastrous defeat was kept out of newspapers for more than 24 hours. As soon as the extent of the defeat was known, many editors howled. The *New York Times* complained that 'every effort was made by the correspondents there to transmit the facts speedily to their respective newspapers; and every effort was made by the Government to prevent them from doing so. The telegraphic wires were forbidden, except to the most meager statements…and reporters were compelled to run a blockade more strict than that of Charleston Harbor (90).

Censoring the media in this way was a common tactic deployed by the Northern government as Lincoln proved himself more than willing to censor, repress, or even jail people he deemed a threat to the Union's cause. It is well known that on several occasions Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus, preventing individuals from their constitutional right to appear before a court and determine if their imprisonment was lawful. Lesser known is that Lincoln and many of his subordinates were responsible for suppressing more than 300 newspapers that opposed the president during his tenure (Bulla, 2013: 11). Many scholars argue whether Lincoln was too restrictive or not restrictive enough with limiting the first amendment rights of political dissidents. Although Lincoln often implored his subordinates to "tread softly" and act in a slightly less repressive manner than they did, he still headed a regime that toed the line of tyranny at times. While this form of media manipulation and suppression by the North may not have been agreeable to those who ardently supported the First Amendment, if these measures prevented the public from learning about the devastation the Union had incurred, then it was viewed as justifiable for lessening public fear and dissent.

Not only was the telegraph meaningful to citizens inquiring for news, but it also became a monumental source of communication for the Northern military. For the first time in history, a military unit at Fredericksburg—the U.S. Army Signal Corps—deployed an electric telegraph used to communicate on the battlefield. Telegraphs were used by Burnside to communicate with commanders on his left and right flanks. Though it did not affect the battle at Fredericksburg's outcome, the telegraph would have a profound impact on future Civil War campaigns (Goolrick, 1985: 42). Part of the reason why the telegraph was not an instant success on the battlefield was the difficulty of setting it up. The telegraphic wire had very particular needs on the battlefield. Originally, the wires lacked the power to transmit messages beyond a distance of five miles, as

the uncoated copper wire had to be meticulously strung on poles and fitted with glass insulators. Soon after Fredericksburg, though, more powerful and rugged wires were produced that allowed messages to be transmitted further distances and allowed rubber-coated wires to be strewn about over tree branches or simply un-coiled right on the ground (Goolrick, 1985: 48). The use of telegraph wires on the battlefield provided an invaluable advantage when it came to instant communication and strategy among military personnel.

In addition to the battlefield commanders, Lincoln also found use in the telegraph. In fact, he relied heavily on it. The commander-in-chief often used the telegraph office, located in the War Department's library, across the street from the White House. According to David Bates, Lincoln's telegraph office manager, "the President spent more of his waking hours in the War Department telegraph office than in any other place, except the White House" (Bates, 1907). During the Battle of Fredericksburg, Lincoln was at his usual post, waiting on word from the battlefield. The editorial comments of the telegraph operator captured the atrocity of the battle, noting "the wounded & killed is immense. The battle rages furiously. Can hardly hear my Instrument" (Wheeler, 2006: 91). The president used the telegraph with extreme frequency, growing more comfortable with the technology. In 1861, Lincoln sent "slightly more than a dozen electronic messages," none of which gave direction on military affairs. His approach changed drastically in 1862 (Wheeler, 2006: 91). He became much more willing to extend his voice and assert his leadership through this new technology. With the telegraph at his disposal, Lincoln and the North had an enormous advantage that the Southern states could not compete with due to their lack of resources.

Southern Newspaper Coverage

While the Northern media was doing its best to persuade folks that the Battle of Fredericksburg was not nearly as devastating as it seemed, the Southern media were also playing their part in selling the success of Fredericksburg to their citizens. Most Southern newspapers were very adamant about their army's most recent dominance. The *Richmond Examiner* declared Fredericksburg a "stunning defeat to the invader, a splendid victory to the defender of the sacred soil." The *Charleston Mercury* continued to back its Southern leadership saying that "General Lee knows his business and the army has yet known no such word as fail" (Goolrick, 1985: 92).

The *Daily Richmond Inquirer* proclaimed great success for the South. "The fighting yesterday…was of the most desperate character and was of signal advantage to our cause, resulting as it did, in decided successes to our arms in the repulses of the lines of the enemy at all points." It also added, "The fight on our side was conducted with judgment, discretion and signal success." The article went on to credit the bravery of troops from North Carolina and Georgia for their fighting, and suggest that the Yankees fought well but "our forces did better" ("From Fredericksburg"). The South was supremely confident in reporting success at Fredericksburg. Lacking in official numbers, *The Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register* relied on early estimates, and while ultimately proven right, they were doing what they could to assure their readers of a definitive win and help sell the strength of their army. "The slaughter of the enemy was very great—vastly exceeding ours" ("The Latest News"). One report even saw the battle as more than just a tactical loss by the North. The *Fayetteville Observer* stated, "The retreat of the yankees indicates more of demoralization than of actual loss" ("The News"). And, as was customary at the time, extremely descriptive accounts were offered when available. *The Camden Confederate*

wrote about General Gregg of South Carolina who "was killed by a Minie ball, which struck him in the side and penetrated the spine" ("Battle at Fredericksburg").

The media also did what they could to unite Southerners against the North through means of propaganda. *The Charleston Courier, Tri-Weekly* claimed the North destroyed an Episcopal church and several other public buildings, sending women and children scattering. "This is regarded as the most unprovoked and wanton exhibition of brutality that has yet disgraced the Yankee army" ("From Fredericksburg"). The *Daily Morning News*, a Georgia newspaper, did its best to make Southerners aware of just how evil Union soldiers were. "Nearly every house was sacked and the contents wantonly destroyed. Every conceivable injury that malice could suggest was resorted to in their retreat across the river. They propped up dead bodies of their soldiers to represent pickets" ("Further From Fredericksburg"). Similar to the Union, Confederate media were persistent in their attempts to boost the morale and unity of the rebel cause.

Western Newspaper Coverage

Western newspapers were typically too far away from the battles to cover them. As a result, the West relied heavily on reports printed from newspapers closer to the battle grounds. Thousands of miles away from the chaos and destruction in the East, citizens cared a great deal about receiving updates from across the United States. For these people, the heavier fighting may have seemed a world away, but the tension and disputes were alive and well near the Pacific. There was rampant fighting in the Pacific theater as a result of the Indian Wars, which kept many civilians on edge. Tensions also ran high in the West because of a large pro-Southern contingent with secessionist sympathies. Although no secession attempts were ever enacted along the Pacific coast, the threat of it and subsequent fighting could not be ruled out. The West also took great interest in the war because many had friends and family back East, either participating

directly in the war or feeling its effects indirectly. These Western newspapers relied heavily on the telegraph to obtain the most current news. Even then, the news was not always current—or accurate.

A December 20 edition of the *Oregonian* re-printed the December 12 report of a New York paper that erroneously stated that the North was "in full possession of Fredericksburg" ("By Overland Telegraph"). A December 17 report in the *Daily Evening Bulletin* focused on Burnside's successful escape from Fredericksburg, saying it was a "complete success" and "admirably managed." A nearly 1400-word article made no mention of the Union casualty numbers or the fact that it lost the battle. Instead the focus was on the escape, Burnside's leadership, and why the army was moving through Fredericksburg to begin with ("Happy Escape from a Dangerous Position"). Just two days later, however, the *Bulletin* was willing to admit defeat. The paper lamented the loss at Fredericksburg for the Union. "Our regiments were simply butchered." While upset and disappointed, the newspaper did not go so far as to be outraged or blame anyone before the facts were collected. "At this distance from the scene, and especially before the matter is investigated, it would be not only unwise but positively folly to indulge in indiscriminate blame of the Administration, the government and the army" ("The Great Disaster"). With most of the country's telegraphing wire emanating from the North, Western newspapers would, by default, be reading about the war from a Northern perspective. Thus, while the true decimation of Union troops at Fredericksburg may have been known by many out west, receiving reports that were even half as erroneous as the one the *Oregonian* printed meant it would be easier to sell a Northern point of view to Western audiences. Battles that were completely one-sided like Fredericksburg could be made to look much closer and more

competitive than they really were, based on who controlled the flow and spread of communication.

Ever-aware of his impending doom, Renfroe wrote an ominous letter to his brother before leaving for Fredericksburg. In it he states, "We have just completed another march of one hundred and seventy miles…We are certainly on the eve of a great battle here…I may not survive the conflict, but, brother, if I die, I shall fall at my post, and I am ready to go" (Renfroe, 2000: 7). He remained resolute to fight.

Overmatched by the charging Union soldiers, Renfroe fought, waiting for back-up to arrive. As many of his comrades began to retreat, Renfroe told the few remaining soldiers by his side to "get out the best you can." As the others turned to leave, Renfroe stood his ground, fighting until the bitter end. Refusing to give his ground, Renfroe was killed by Union forces on the third day of battle (Renfroe, 2000: 10).

Nathaniel Renfroe was just one of nearly 18,000 casualties at Fredericksburg. His story is similar to many of his comrades, who fought valiantly in spite of overwhelming odds. Despite the importance of this battle, it is often overshadowed due to other, larger battles and, more importantly from a Northern viewpoint, by battles the Union won. This, however, does not lessen the importance of the battle at Fredericksburg or lessen the media's influence in controlling the spread of information. Each battle is significant for its own reasons and must be remembered so. At Fredericksburg, it is important to remember the crushing defeat the Union suffered, the effect it had on Northern morale, and the subsequent changes that took place in the Union's military hierarchy.

In this case, the Battle of Fredericksburg also has meaning due to the media's influence on its outcome. Fredericksburg served as a test for many media outlets to either lambast Union

leaders or spin results to keep hope alive at a time when confidence was waning. It was a judgment each newspaper had to make carefully as their decisions played a vital role in shaping the nation's opinion. At Fredericksburg, the media's and government's use of newspapers, photography, and telegraphy aided the North's ability to portray a devastating defeat as only a temporary setback. While the Southern media touted Confederate success, it was the North that was more likely to succeed in spinning the news due to their more abundant coverage and their greater interconnectivity with the West.

Chapter Three

Media at Gettysburg

William Colvill, 31 years old when the Civil War began, was the first man to volunteer to serve in the Union army when the call went out to Goodhue County, Minnesota, in April 1861. This formation of Goodhue residents would later become Company F of the Minnesota First Regiment (Feeler, 1936). Like the majority of Civil War participants, Colvill had no prior military experience but remained resolute to protect his loved ones and country. Listed at a burly, 6-5", and as the elder statesman of the group, Colvill was immediately elected captain of the company. Since it was impossible to imagine what lay ahead during the Civil War, Colvill and the Minnesota First found themselves in a harrowing position at the Battle of Gettysburg.

Colvill grew up in New York, studied law in Buffalo under future President Millard Fillmore, and then returned to his hometown of Forestville to practice law until 1854. At that time, he decided to move west, settling in the Minnesota territory. Colvill held a few different jobs in his new home of Red Wing. He had his own law practice, was the county clerk, and served as the sole editor at the Red Wing Sentinel (Hatler, 2014). As part of the Union forces, Colvill served in 28 different battles (Feeler, 1936). In June 1863, Colvill was promoted to colonel and commander of his regiment. When the Battle of Gettysburg began a couple weeks later, Colvill and his men were ready to fight; but first, Colvill had to find his way out of house arrest.

The Battle of Gettysburg spanned the course of three days, as more than 165,000 total troops participated in the bloodiest battle of the war. It was a battle that saw more than 23,000 Union casualties and more than 28,000 Confederate casualties as the Yankees staved off the

Southern offensive and drove the Rebel forces back across the Potomac River into Virginia. Many historians look to this battle as the turning point of the war. For this and a myriad of other reasons, Gettysburg has become one of the most well-known and studied battles of the Civil War and, perhaps, all time. To better understand how the fighting unraveled, it is important to understand the months that preceded the battle.

The start of the Union's 1863 war campaign began almost as poorly as it ended in 1862. Following their demoralizing defeat at Fredericksburg, the Yankees spent a relatively quiet winter participating in a variety of smaller skirmishes. Major General Joseph Hooker initially took control of the Army of the Potomac following Ambrose Burnside's dismissal. The winter and time off from fighting allowed Union soldiers to regroup and renew their sense of hope. This was done with the help of Hooker who, upon his ascension, instituted a number of changes to the army's rations and medical care that boosted morale and prepared his men to fight once more. Unfortunately for the Union, it was Hooker who seemed ill-prepared to fight at the Battle of Chancellorsville.

When fighting at Chancellorsville began on April 30, 1863, all of the preparation and confidence instilled by Hooker during the winter disappeared, leaving his troops in disarray. "It was generally agreed that Hooker lost his nerve when he met stiff enemy resistance for the first time on May 1" (Coddington, 1968: 33). Hooker had started his march as the aggressor, but quickly turned defensive when finally confronted by Southern General Robert E. Lee's men. The Union general's reticence was compounded by his tactical errors in judgment, his failure to use two of his "finest corps" led by Generals John Reynolds and George Meade, and his lack of acknowledgement or understanding in regard to his blunders. As Hooker would later recall, "'no general battle was fought at Chancellorsville, I was unwilling to give battle with such great odds

against me…We lost no honor at Chancellorsville'" (Coddington, 1968: 34). They may not have lost any honor according to Hooker, but they did incur 14,000 casualties, roughly 4,000 more than the Confederates who had been outnumbered almost two to one (Hemingway, 1996). All of these events would cause Union soldiers and generals to lose confidence in their leader. This set off a string of disagreements that pitted Hooker against General-in-Chief Henry Halleck and President Abraham Lincoln, culminating in Hooker's resignation.

His resignation occurred because military commander-in-chief Halleck denied him the ability to utilize a garrison at Harpers Ferry. Hooker had been hoping to deploy this garrison to the Confederate rear and cut off Lee's ability to retreat. Hooker and Halleck had an icy relationship that came to a head over the military occupation at Harpers Ferry. Upon receiving Halleck's explanation for declining his request, Hooker assembled all of his arguments and sought to surpass Halleck's command, asking for his case to be presented to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Lincoln. Without waiting for an answer, Hooker then sent in his resignation on the grounds that with the current military means at his disposal, there was no way he could protect both Harpers Ferry and Washington D.C. (Coddington, 1968: 130). After having lost a significant amount of confidence in Hooker's leadership, Lincoln quickly accepted and anointed George Meade as the Army of the Potomac's next general, even though another battle appeared to be looming. "As *New York Herald* reporter, T.C. Grey, wrote his editor: 'The relieving of Hooker is received with a kind of apathetic indifference by the army, although many are loud in denouncing the act *at this particular moment*,'" (Maihafer, 2003: 117).

Meade was informed of the decision on June 28, just three days before he was to be confronted at Gettysburg. Despite a lack of preparation time, Meade and the North came out victorious, a watershed moment that turned the war's tide. Over time, the Battle of Gettysburg

has become popularized and romanticized in ways that can make the on-field fighting seem detached from its historical idealization. More than 150 years removed from the battle, it is easy to become caught up in grandiose notions of glory and patriotism, celebrating romantic revisions rather than dwelling on the horrific individual cost. The past century-and-a-half has shaped our memories of Gettysburg in a few particular ways. First and foremost are the alarming numbers that bear repeating. This was a three-day battle that saw more than 165,000 soldiers enter the fray. More than 51,000 of them became casualties. To put that in perspective, that is 15,000 more casualties than any other battle during the war—the runner up being the Seven Days Battle in 1862 with just over 35,000 casualties ("Civil War Casualties"). Gettysburg also incurred more casualties than Antietam and Fredericksburg combined. These disturbing numbers were preceded by an always present sense of impending mortality that soldiers carried into each battle. Priests were often called upon prior to battles in an effort to absolve soldiers of their sins should they perish while fighting. Acting almost as a premonition of sorts, a Catholic priest, Father William Corby, tried offering absolution to all before the Battle of Gettysburg commenced. Corby reflected on this moment after the battle. "'Catholic and non-Catholic,' Corby wrote, 'showed a profound respect, wishing at this fatal crisis to receive every benefit of divine grace that could be imparted.' The chaplain added generously that 'general absolution was intended for all…not only for our brigade, but for all, North or South, who were susceptible of it and who were about to appear before their Judge'" (Faust, 2008: 8). The constant threat of death was always nearby for Civil War soldiers. In spite of this, they continued to fight.

Prior to Gettysburg, Lee had become emboldened with his recent string of success and looked at invading the North as an opportunity to put sizable political pressure on Lincoln to agree to a truce. Though this contest was extremely close and very conceivably could have ended

in a Confederate triumph, Union soldiers managed to stand their ground, driving the Rebels back to the South. While this moment is viewed as a turning point in the war, it is also viewed now, and was then, as a missed opportunity by the North to squash the rebellion on the spot and put an end to the war. Meade had failed to pursue Lee's army as they retreated, which made Lincoln furious (Maihafer, 2003: 119-20). Lincoln had seen this same scenario play out after Antietam when General George McClellan allowed Lee to safely escape Northern territory. Lincoln told his Secretary, John Hay, "This is a dreadful reminiscence of McClellan…The whole country is our soil.'" Lincoln was angry that his generals kept thinking about driving the invaders out of "our" territory. He wanted them to think in terms of "one *inseparable* country" (Maihafer, 2003: 120). Lincoln understood what Gettysburg meant to the war and, also, what it could have meant had it been finished properly by Meade.

Lincoln, then, becomes the other most remembered part of this battle. His Gettysburg Address, given on November 19, 1863, has long been remembered—mostly for the effect it had, but also for the effect media had on popularizing this moment. The brevity of Lincoln's speech surprised many in attendance who were accustomed to hours of oration—not minutes. But Lincoln's 272-word address quickly spread throughout the country, hailed in the North as much as it was mocked in the South. On November 21, 1863, the *Springfield Republican* (Massachusetts) dubbed Lincoln's Gettysburg address a "perfect gem; deep in feeling, compact in thoughts and expression, and tasteful and elegant in every word and comma" (Risley, 2004: 222-3). The *Ohio State Journal*, whose editor had been in attendance, "noted that when the president said, 'The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here,' an officer who had lost an arm buried his face in his hands and sobbed" (Risley, 2004: 23). Lincoln's address made its way across the country as Western

newspapers got a hold of copies from larger papers in the North. In Minnesota, the speech was copied from the *Chicago Tribune* and carried in the *Winona Daily Republican* on November 23 and in the *Saint Paul Daily Press* on November 25. A November 20 *New York Herald* article noted how Gettysburg had become consecrated as the second national cemetery after Bunker Hill. "Bunker Hill reminds us how hard it is for a people to win their freedom, and Gettysburg how much harder it may be to keep it" (Risley, 2004: 221). In regard to creating a national cemetery at Gettysburg, "the *New York Herald* said the cemetery would be a new monument to freedom. In the South, though, the *Richmond Inquirer* had ridiculed the cemetery dedication" (Risley, 2004: 215). The *Richmond Examiner* fell in line with its Southern counterpart as they deemed the Gettysburg address nothing more than "stage play." They sarcastically remark that in "spite of shoddy contracts, of universal corruption, and cruel thirst for Southern blood, these people have ideas of the great virtues and lofty qualities which ennoble a nation…" (Risley, 2004: 222). Whichever part of the country one hailed from, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address held deep meanings and became a significant part of the battle's legacy.

Northern Newspaper Coverage

The Battle of Gettysburg may have only spanned three days, but the media's coverage of it was thorough and long-lasting. Prior to the battle's beginning, Lee's army made its way into the North, sending immediate shockwaves into the region. The *New Haven Daily Palladium* (Connecticut) reported that just outside of Gettysburg, Confederates were said to have "burned twenty-five houses in Shippensburg." As the Union cavalry met them in Gettysburg, they "received a glorious welcome" ("By Telegraph"). A fight was imminent. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* sensed the urgency of the matter and shouted: "To Arms! Citizens of Pennsylvania! The Rebels Are Upon Us!" (Maihafer, 2003: 117). The actual fighting at Gettysburg was first

reported in a "dispatch written hastily by the chief correspondent of the *New York Times*, L.L. Crounse: 'Near Gettysburg, July 1—A heavy engagement has been going on since nine o'clock this A.M. between the rebel forces of Longstreet and Hill and the First and Eleventh Corps under Gens. Reynolds and Meade. The locality of the fight is beyond Gettysburg, on the Chambersburg Pike. Portions of the fight have been very severe, and with heavy loss…'" (Maihafer, 2003: 117-8). As was the case at other battles, there were examples of strong reporting that offered extreme detail, of which Crounse is a great case in point. His report, written on July 2, provided pinpoint descriptions about the corps engaged in fighting, a whole host of individuals who had become casualties, and the various times throughout the day when news occurred. Crounse also described how Union forces had captured "400 prisoners…on the spot," how the land was "generally open and rolling" with "not much timber," and how Union General John Reynolds had been "killed by a rebel sharpshooter, who shot him through the head" (Holzer, 2010: 247). Although the media was widely used to construct a narrative of their side's success, this further demonstrates that many journalists did try to provide detailed reports. They tried to present the truth and offer facts, even if they could not completely withhold their prejudice as was the case in this *New York Times* report, which let through glimpses of Northern bias. According to the article, "so accurate was the aim of our men" and "the rebels have fewer advantages than heretofore" are two instances in which a bit of Northern perspective seeped into the writing (Holzer, 2010: 247).

Many papers, though, were much more openly biased in their reporting. In the North, many newspapers immediately made it clear that a victory on Union soil was not just likely; it was a certainty. A *New York Tribune* article, written July 1, 1863, stated that the South was making the battle easy on its counterpart by moving the fighting into Northern territory and wished to "heartily thank" the rebels for "transferring the seat of war from their own wasted

fields to the rich valley and teeming hillsides of the Free States" (Risley, 2004: 215). Similarly, the *North American and United States Gazette* (Pennsylvania) was ready to pitch the idea of success to Northerners as soon as the battle began. "You may expect to hear of brilliant news, the whole army is in splendid spirits," the Northeastern paper declared ("By Telegraph, for the American and Gazette"). The *Gazette* also tried to convey the urgency with which both sides fought. "They were in search of each other. Both felt the necessity of fighting. They met and they fought on the instant" ("A Desperate Battle at Gettysburg"). According to very early Northern reports, the battle was "fierce and bloody" and greatly in favor of the Union. As the *Boston Daily Advertiser* noted and believed, the rebellion had "received its mortal wound" ("The Rebel Invasion").

Even as more detailed reports about the grizzly fighting trickled in, Northern newspaper optimism remained high. Details from July 3 indicate that fighting began at 4 a.m. and lasted throughout the day. "The musketry fight is wholly within the woods. The artillery occupy an eminence shorn of timber. The attack was commenced by the rebels on our right. The fight there has been unceasing, and the irregularity of the fire, which is slack and scattering for a while and then heavy and continued, indicates the arrival of reinforcements on both sides. Our men are in the best of spirits, and the general officers feel confident of the result" ("By Telegraph, for the American and Gazette"). Many papers fervently depicted soldiers as happy and convinced of their success. However, it was Northern newspapers that truly evoked confidence, while the battle's outcome was still undecided. Northern hopes for long-term success were high as evidenced by a *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* report on July 4. "If we can beat them the rebellion is crushed, for whether we capture and destroy their army, or whether we only drive them back to Richmond, they cannot live through another winter" ("The Situation"). While this proved to be

wildly inaccurate, the *Sentinel* was not alone in its beliefs. The idea that a victory at Gettysburg would halt the rebellion was widely shared in the North.

When the battle had finally been decided and the Confederates made their trek back to Virginia, newspapers on both sides reacted accordingly. "After the battle, Northern newspapers exalted in the Union victory at Gettysburg, while Southern newspapers downplayed the devastating loss" (Risley, 2004: 214). The *New York Times* celebrated the victory. "The army of the Potomac has not only won a great battle, and delivered the nation from the greatest perils of war, but it has triumphantly vindicated its claim to be classed with the veteran and heroic armies that history delights to honor" (Risley, 2004: 69). *The Daily Cleveland Herald* also proclaimed a "brilliant victory" had been won by the Union. "Our loss has been large but has resulted, so far as known, in decided success" ("Latest News"). For the Federals, it was easy to rejoice. They had just driven their enemy out of Northern territory, preserving their land, and bolstering their chances at winning the war. The Northern media was technically correct in espousing the magnitude of their victory, but they also avoided looking at how close they had come to losing or what the effect of their high casualties might have on them moving forward. This was done in an effort to spin the news and the hopes of a nation.

Visuals

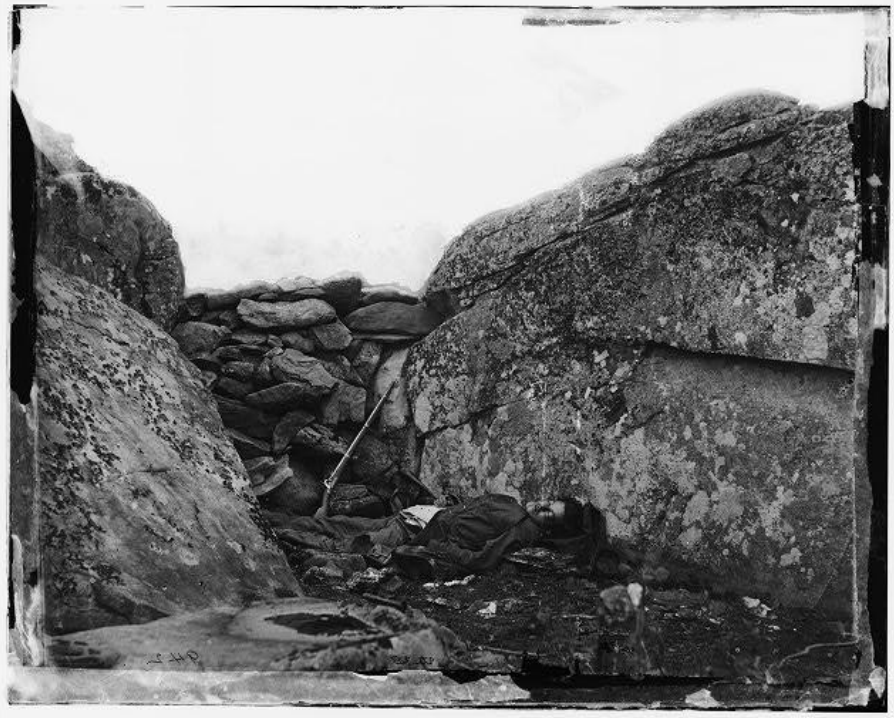
Another form of news spinning and manipulation at Gettysburg took place through photography. While photography had made a splash with its usage at the Battle of Antietam in September 1862, its contribution at Gettysburg took the medium to an unprecedented level of importance. Many of the pictures that exist are thanks to official Gettysburg photographer William Tipton, who "produced an inventory of more than five thousand pictures that included landscapes, veterans' reunions, and hundreds of monument 'portraits'" (Watts, 2015: 136). All of

these photographs were taken after the battle had ended. As moving images could not yet be captured, photographs of battles were taken after their conclusion. One war correspondent, George Townsend, noted "the sickening smell of mortality" all photographers endured when photographing the battlefield (Sachsman, 2014: 199). After scouring these battlefields littered with the unburied dead, it became readily apparent that photography had been just as important to soldiers as it was to the media. During the Civil War, many soldiers possessed ambrotypes, photographs made on a glass plate, which was viewed by reflected light, like print on a paper. Soldiers carried these pictures with them as they moved from town to town and often kept the ambrotypes with them during battle. Amos Humiston was a Yankee soldier at Gettysburg who died with "an ambrotype of three children 'tightly clasped in his hands.'" He became the focus of national attention as the media tried to track down his information and celebrate the devotion to his children (Faust, 2008: 11). In doing so, Humiston, and all Union soldiers by association, were implicitly viewed as the type of loving, family man that had been unjustly stricken down by rebel warfare. This effort by the media to unearth Humiston's story can be viewed as another instance in which the North sought to galvanize their moral cause against the South.

Confederate soldiers also made use of ambrotypes during the war. Studio-shot Southern photography was prevalent at the time. Though many portraits were made, due to the South's inability to factory-produce brass mats or even cases for the ambrotypes, many Confederates had to re-use materials or create their own makeshift cases (Rosenheim, 2013: 48). Southern battlefield photography, however, is conspicuously absent at Gettysburg, much as it was at Antietam, Fredericksburg, and nearly every other instance of fighting during the war. They simply did not have the resources or means to capture photographic evidence from the front lines. This provided the North with a distinct advantage.

At Gettysburg, Gardner and his assistants, Timothy O'Sullivan and James Gibson, were first on the scene. They arrived in time to take pictures of the dead strewn about the Pennsylvania fields. Brady, the most well-known photographer at the time, arrived a week after Gardner's crew and, with the help of guides, took photos of important landmarks and battle locations (Morrow, 2007). Though he did not capture images of any dead bodies at Gettysburg, Brady has long been given credit for his ability to put the Gettysburg landscape into perspective for historians. Gardner, O'Sullivan, and Gibson were the first, and only ones, to get pictures of the dead at Gettysburg, taking 60 photos, almost three-fourths of dead soldiers and horses (Risley, 2012: 48). Like reporters, photographers often found themselves in dangerous situations when moving from one battlefield to the next. "On July 5, 1863, while on the way to photograph the aftermath of the Battle of Gettysburg, Alexander Gardner was taken prisoner for a few hours by members of Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Stuart's troopers soon released Gardner, who later returned to photograph the scene of his detainment" (Morrow, 2007). After realizing Gardner was not a physical threat to them, the Confederate general let him go. Gardner made his way to the battlefield and took some of the most iconic war photos ever, some of which were staged. A few of Gardner's images from that battle may "constitute history's first well-documented instance of photo-manipulation by photojournalists." Many photo historians have pointed out the movement of a dead Confederate soldier who appears to be used in several different photos taken by Gardner at Gettysburg (Morrow, 2007). The photos in question are *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep, Gettysburg* and *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg*. These two pictures appear to show the same Southern soldier, likely moved from one scene to the next. Gardner had moved the body and manipulated the photographs, unnoticed at the time, but demonstrating the ability for those in the media to control the message sent out to the public.

Alexander Gardner's *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep, Gettysburg*



Alexander Gardner's *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg*

In another now famous incident of likely manipulation, *Harper's Weekly*, known mostly for its illustrations at the time, released the first major graphic coverage of the battle on August 22, 1863. Perhaps the two most popular images from this initial batch of photographs were *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg* and *Field Where General Reynolds Fell, Gettysburg* (Rosenheim, 2013: 94). The first photo, *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg*, is a picture by O'Sullivan from Gettysburg's aftermath that helped convey the magnitude of the desolation. The photo was printed as a full-page spread in *Harper's Weekly*, with a byline attributing it to Alexander Gardner (Sachsman, 2014: 194). In this photo, Gardner categorizes the soldiers as Southerners who "paid with life the price of their treason." In another photo, the same group of fallen soldiers appears to be shot from another angle, this time describing them as "our own men." This photo, *Field Where General Reynolds Fell, Gettysburg*, presents the Union soldiers in a much more favorable light, "as though they had passed away in the act of prayer." (Rosenheim, 2013: 94-5). Gardner used these two photographs shot by O'Sullivan to point out how Southern forces had gotten what they deserved, while Northern troops were unjustly slaughtered. Not only did Gardner likely lie about these photographs, but he used it as a chance to influence the minds of his audience by portraying a group of dead soldiers as treasonous Confederates deserving of death and then using the same group of dead soldiers to lionize the Union, making heroes out of them, simply by presenting the scene from a different angle.

Timothy O'Sullivan's *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg*

Timothy O'Sullivan's *Field Where General Reynolds Fell, Gettysburg*

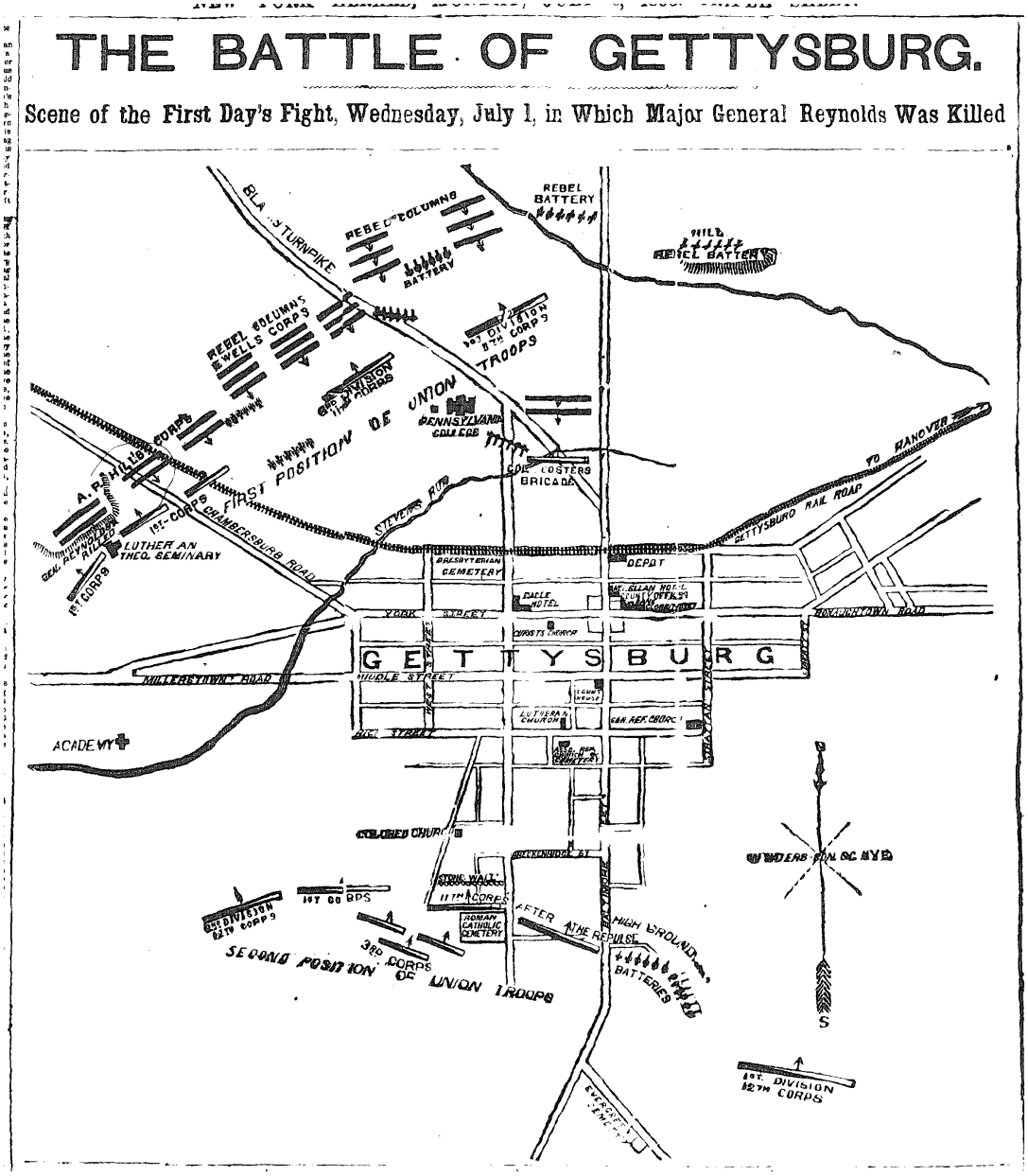
Due to the nature of their resources, in terms of money and equipment, Northern photographers were often able to travel with the army and photograph the true horrors of war. "No photographers traveled with Confederate armies to make documentary photos in the fashion of Gardner and Brady" (Morrow, 2007). As Northern newspapers published and distributed more pictures than the South, a pro-Northern message could be subtly crafted through these images that would be viewed by a mass audience. This message reinforced the importance of fighting at both a macro and micro level. The grim, often gruesome pictures, served as a reminder to fight, not only to preserve the Union and rid the country of slavery, but to honor their fallen friends and relatives who had already died. The North was able to do this in two ways. They were much better equipped to produce these photographic images through the literal lens of their cameras. Perhaps just as importantly, though, they were able to impart their views to the country as a whole through the metaphorical lens of a Northern perspective. As photographic historian Jennifer Watts noted, "most photographers working in the field were under contract with the federal government or gained access to the battlefield through political connections. Which means that most of the well-known Civil War photographs were produced from a Northern perspective" (Watts, 2015: 149). The pictures were largely taken of Northerners, by Northerners, and for Northerners, giving them an inherently Northern point of view on the war when spread around the country. This made the photographs at the time, and their effect on the war, very powerful, if not biased.

Though photographs had taken precedent at Gettysburg, *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* still thrived on their war coverage with the use of illustrations. One particular illustration showed a panoramic view of Gettysburg during the battle, something that would have been impossible with photography. This illustration depicted General James Longstreet's failed

attack on Union forces. *Harper's Weekly* said the attack had been "reckless," "daring," and noted how the Confederates left their "dead and wounded behind them" ("Gettysburg Battle"). While this was not a blatant form of news spinning as often seen in the North, it tried to represent Southern forces in a hasty and repulsive manner.

Original Caption: "The Battle of Gettysburg – Longstreet's attack on our Left Center – Blue Ridge in the Distance – From a Drawing by Mr. A. R. Waud" ("Gettysburg Battle")

Battlefield maps at Gettysburg were provided for civilians just as they were at other battles. These maps remained a source of intrigue for readers. In conjunction with photographs and illustrations, maps allowed civilians to add another piece to the puzzle, which provided more clarity in regard to the geographical and tactical underpinnings of a battle.



(*The Civil War: A Newspaper Perspective*. Image 487, 1999)

The Telegraph

Just as the visual medium had played a prominent role at Gettysburg so, too, did the telegraph. This form of communication was commonly used in the North for political and military reasons. Lincoln was a staunch supporter of the electric medium and used it more

frequently as the war continued. “In 1862, Lincoln had discovered the telegraph’s ability to project his voice; in 1863, he expanded on the telegraph’s ability to also be his eyes and ears” (Wheeler, 2006: 110). Whereas Lincoln had initially just used the telegraph to give direction at the onset of war, by the time the Battle of Gettysburg came around, he had started using it to understand the current military layout and communicate with his generals. The North relied on this communication system during the war, and it proved to be an invaluable advantage over the South when it worked correctly. Working correctly, though, was not always assured. Leading up to the battle, on a day in late June, Lincoln received a telegraph from Simon Cameron, his former secretary of war and now Minister to Russia, with information that Lee and his army were preparing to attack in the coming days in Pennsylvania. Later that day, however, Confederate cavalry cut the line to Meade’s headquarters, disconnecting him from the president (Wheeler, 2006: 124). Confederate Major General Stuart and his cavalrymen had severed a majority of the wires (Maihafer, 2003: 118). Cutting wires was a tactic employed by both sides during the war, meant to disrupt and prevent communication. While Meade lost his contact with Washington, he still possessed “telegraphic communication with his corps and division commanders during battle” (Wheeler, 2006: 125). Meade’s communication with his battlefield comrades helped direct movements and strategies within the Union line. The disconnection with Lincoln was eventually fixed as Aaron Homer Byington of the *New York Tribune* was the first one to break though after finding a local telegrapher to help patch a break in the line (Maihafer, 2003: 118).

Even then, though, military leaders often had to contend with other issues. One such problem was the reliance on, and desertion of, telegraph operators. As most of the messages were encrypted, the military relied heavily on these operators to decipher the messages received and

report their contents faithfully to commanders. When operators did not do this, it made communication nearly impossible as historian William Phalen noted:

> [I]t took twenty-four hours for dispatches to reach Washington from General Meade's headquarters. Even worse, on the morning of July 3, Meade wired General Halleck that the transmissions received the previous day from Washington were undecipherable because the telegraph operator, named Caldwell, had disappeared with the code. On July 4, Meade again wired Halleck that he was still unable to read the dispatches, now forty-eight hours old; additionally Meade had found out that Caldwell had insisted on his independence and had moved the army's telegraph office to Westminster, Maryland, twenty-five miles away. It seems that he had become frightened during the fighting on the second day, which had gotten uncomfortably close to Meade's headquarters. Now at Westminster, he was safe, but useless. (56)

Meade called for Caldwell's immediate return to Gettysburg, but the order was ignored, and this made life much more difficult on the Union general. Despite the inconvenience this caused the North during their trials at Gettysburg, they found themselves victorious. Lincoln then used the telegraph to spread the news and his message across the country. The War Department sent a telegram on Independence Day, 1863, citing the dramatic win at Gettysburg. The message read: "The President announces to the country that news from the Army of the Potomac, up to 10 P.M. of the 3rd, is such as to cover that Army with the highest honor, to promise a great success to the cause of the Union, and to claim the condolence of all for the many gallant fallen. And that for this, he especially desires that on this day, He whose will, not ours, should ever be done, be everywhere remembered and reverenced with profoundest gratitude" (Wheeler, 2006: 125-6). Not only had the telegraph aided the Union's cause on the battlefield, but it was also used to spread news to all corners of the nation. Having a vastly superior telegraphy system gave the North a decided advantage, not only in terms of communicating with others in disparate parts of the country, but in terms of spreading Northern news and its inherent Northern bias, as well.

Southern Newspaper Coverage

While the Northern media was doing their best to promote and celebrate the dominant victory, the South was doing what it could to downplay the devastation and back its soldiers. Prior to the battle, Richmond's *Daily Dispatch* did its best to fan the flames of war by encouraging Southern troops to pillage and plunder Northern cities as retribution for what had been done to them. This plea was cast in defiance of General Lee's request to abstain from such actions. "In what respect could we be worsened by retaliation? The enemy could not treat us worse than is treating us now! He burns and pillages whatever he chooses, and he hands and shoots whomever he pleases" (Risley, 2004: 217). As the North wrecked havoc on the Southern towns they fought in, leaving them devoid of supplies, the *Daily Dispatch* demanded retribution. In addition to the destruction the Union inflicted, the South denounced what they perceived to be a faux righteous high ground by the North. One Georgia newspaper called out the North for looking down upon Southerners, who were seen as amoral. The *Daily Morning News* stated: "When we find General Lee retaliating upon the farmers of Pennsylvania all that Hooker has inflicted upon the planters of Georgia and Carolina; when rapine and arson set up in the captured towns of the North the same infernal carnival to which they have been invited in the South, then, and not till then, we may call upon the world to witness that the officers and soldiers of the slaveholder's rebellion are really as reckless of humanity and of decency as the officers and soldiers of liberty and the Union!" ("Latest and Highly Interesting from the North"). Snippets of reporting like these demonstrate the South was cognizant of, and offended by, a disparaging Northern narrative that depicted Southerners as unethical and themselves as beacons of morality.

When the Battle of Gettysburg convened, a couple of Southern reporters relayed the grizzly news of the battle without providing enough details to suggest a Confederate loss of any

kind. An *Augusta Constitutionalist* (Georgia) correspondent wrote about the attack from the back lines. “As soon as we emerged from the woods and came into the open field, the enemy poured a most terrific fire into our ranks. When we reached the base of the range upon which the enemy were posted, they opened up on us with their infantry, and raked our whole line with grape and canister from more than twenty guns” (Risley, 2012: 22). A *Richmond Inquirer* correspondent described the ghastly scene on July 3 at Gettysburg. “I have never yet heard such tremendous artillery firing. The very earth shook beneath our feet and the hills and rocks seemed to reel like a drunken man” (Risley, 2012: 22). Neither reporter cared to describe the battle’s potential outcome or offer any sense of hope, preferring to stick to the severity of fighting. While these accounts were generally dismissive of the battle’s outcome all together, others were more optimistic. A July 5 dispatch, re-printed in the *Chattanooga Daily Rebel* on July 7, indicated a stalemate at Gettysburg. “The yankee accounts represent the battle at Gettysburg as indecisive. Both sides suffering severely” (“Telegraphic”). *Savannah Republic* (Georgia) reporter Peter Alexander was responsible for the Southern press getting a hold of a Gettysburg account. “The bloodiest and most desperate battle of this bloody and most desperate war has just been fought here on the soil of Pennsylvania.” He tried spinning the loss into a positive for the South saying that “both armies left the battlefield ‘worn, battle-scarred and severely punished’” (Risley, 2012: 23).

In Gettysburg’s aftermath, even after it became apparent to the South that they had not won the war’s most recent bout of carnage, many newspapers advised citizens to remain confident. A July 14, 1863, article from the *Charleston Courier* implored the South to stay calm, saying the results from Gettysburg demanded “coolness, courage, firmness, patience.” The author added that the South “should not yield to despondency now” and that it was “time for us

to show the kind of stuff we are made of" (Risley, 2004: 220). Additionally, on July 15, 1863, Georgia's *Chronicle & Sentinel* encouraged the South to keep hope alive, comparing the situation to that of Americans during the Revolutionary War. The article argued that they were not in nearly as dire straits as the George Washington-led army had been, and, therefore, they should remain upbeat about their chances (Risley, 2004: 221). By invoking the memory of a Revolutionary hero, Southern media hoped to restore Confederate confidence. It was also likely a strategic ploy by the *Chronicle & Sentinel* to draw the ire of Northerners who must have viewed Washington as a defender of freedom, courage, and morality—none of which they thought the South stood for.

As was typically the case in the Deep South, they relied on the telegraph to bring them much of the war news, specifically as the fighting moved northward. Most of the news from Gettysburg took a week or more to reach the South. Once it got there, it was not always guaranteed to provide an accurate summation of what happened. News spinning could span the telegraph wires just as easily as it could the local newspapers, according to historian Ford Risley.

> In Georgia, several of the state's dailies initially declared the battle a victory for the South. The *Savannah Morning News* carried a telegraphic dispatch on July 8, five days after the fighting had concluded, claiming that 'the enemy has been completely routed.' The account provided no details, however. The *Atlanta Daily Intelligencer* reported that Meade's army had 'been completely demolished' and, astonishingly, that 40,000 Union troops had surrendered. (23)

These two, Georgia-based newspapers demonstrated their ability to spread false information in an attempt to control the news. Whether the papers knew the information was inaccurate or not, their dissemination of the reports may have, however briefly, played a role in creating a false sense of hope meant to boost Southern morale.

Western Newspaper Coverage

As was normally the case, the western portion of the country relied heavily on the telegraph for their war updates. Because most of the West's telegraph lines were constructed to connect with Northern cities, most of the information they received had an innately Northern point of view, which would have influenced Western thinking. Though the telegraph got the news to western cities with increased speed, it did not always come with the greatest detail or utmost reliability. In this case, the West received word on the results at Gettysburg in a July 7th *Daily Evening Bulletin* article that announced, "After three days sanguinary battles at Gettysburg, Gen. Meade has defeated Gen. Lee who is now in full retreat" ("The Eastern News"). Interestingly, even the *Daily Evening Bulletin* admits that the follow-up news regarding Gettysburg was better than they expected. "The news concerning the defeat of the rebels in Pennsylvania, contrary to custom, improves as we get more of it. Usually, we have had the best version first, then came gradually the truth, abating from its excellence until what was heralded as a victory turned out but a drawn battle or even defeat. But this time we have been given the best wine last" ("Stirring, Noble News"). Although many readers in the West had grown weary of a potential letdown in the days and weeks following the initial news of a battle's results, they still held on to that initial hope provided by the first wave of dispatches offering optimism for the Union.

Another Western newspaper, *The Dakotian* (South Dakota), gave a brief recap of fighting at Gettysburg, leaving readers with a positive note saying, "The result was in our favor" ("The News"). A separate *Dakotian* report provided further news, declaring Lee had been driven "out of Pennsylvania with a loss of 15,000 killed and wounded, and 20,000 prisoners," It also confidently proclaimed, "The prospect is good for capturing the bulk of Lee's whole army before

he can cross the Potomac" ("Glorious News"). This bold statement did not come to fruition, but it did offer a moment of jubilation to keep Western spirits high. A Colorado newspaper, the *Tri-Weekly Miner's Register*, did not want to speculate on losses accrued and plainly admitted, "The loss on either side is not stated." However, they had no issue declaring victory. According to the pro-Union newspaper, "We are undoubtedly victorious, but at a great cost of life" ("The News"). While the news out West was not always truthfully or accurately reported, it did provide reasons for the people in these cities to remain hopeful and supportive of Northern efforts as the war moved forward.

Colvill had been placed under house arrest for his actions on June 29 in which he let his men cross a stream on a log to keep their feet dry, rather than wading through the water as Colvill was ordered to do (Feeler, 1936). After pleading for his release, Colvill reunited with his regiment and was ready for action on July 2. Colvill's crew was positioned at Cemetery Ridge, part of a hill overlooking a dry creek. Noticing a slight break in the procession of Union soldiers, General Longstreet ordered his Confederate soldiers to attack, seeking to cut the Union line in two and take control of the battle. The First Minnesota had been waiting in the rear and was called upon as the only line of defense separating the Union from disaster. Colvill led a perilous charge into impossible odds. Under heavy rebel fire, Colvill was struck in his right arm with a minié ball that lodged in his shoulder blade. He continued fighting until another shot shattered his ankle and left him hopelessly immobile on the battlefield (Hatler, 2014).

Overpowered by Confederate forces, the First Minnesota had fought desperately to bide time for Union reinforcements to arrive. Colvill, who had been severely wounded by shots to his shoulder and ankle, managed to pull himself into a dry creek bed before falling unconscious. Colvill's wounds proved not to be fatal, though they left him in a debilitated state for the

remainder of his life. Many of his comrades were less fortunate, however, as 215 out of 262 men from the First Minnesota fell dead or wounded. At 82 percent, this constitutes "the highest percentage of casualties suffered by any Union regiment in a single engagement in the entire war" (Moe, 1993: 275). Despite the gruesome outcome for the Minnesotans, they did their job, repulsing the rebels long enough for backups to arrive. In doing so, they helped preserve the Union's hold on Cemetery Ridge and, perhaps, their hold on the battle.

William Colvill wound up being just one of the nearly 52,000 casualties at Gettysburg. His story is like that of nearly one million Civil War soldiers who had no previous combat training but fought for their country, eventually dying and being forgotten to the annals of time. Although the Battle of Gettysburg often overshadows other battles in both history books and society's collective memory, it is important to understand why it has such extreme significance. At Gettysburg, the unprecedented volume of deaths, the Union victory that became a turning point in the war, and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address are all key takeaways from this battle.

Just as these three takeaway points were meaningful to Gettysburg's overall effect on the nation and its war, so, too, was the media's influence. Without the strategic use of these mediums by the media and the government, the war's trajectory may have unfolded in a very different manner. While the Southern media touted Confederate success, it was the North that was more likely to succeed in spinning the news due to their more abundant coverage and their greater interconnectivity with the West. At Gettysburg, the media's and government's use of newspapers, photography, and telegraphy assisted the North's ability to not only win the battle, but portray it as an unequivocal success. This was critical to boosting Northern morale, while building and sustaining a sense of trust among civilians that the Civil War was moving in the right direction and worth continuing. Thus, the media's news spinning at Gettysburg was

essential to Union success. Even though Gettysburg is often viewed as a decisive Union victory, it is thanks in part to the media coverage that proclaimed it as such. The actual battle itself was not a start-to-finish rout of the rebels. It was closely contested, a battle that at various points could have swung in either direction. What made it decisive in the big picture was the Confederacy's retreat to the South, the depletion of their resources that they could not replenish, and their inability to mount another significant threat to the Union. What made it decisive in the battle's immediate aftermath, however, was the persuasive effectiveness of Northern media.

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that the media played a significant role in the Civil War. Media coverage during the war had far reaching effects on the opinion and morale of the nation. As I have shown through the battles of Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg, both the North and South attempted to use media to their advantage. Controlling the spin of information was often a very manipulative process employed by governments and media outlets, alike. However, the North wound up being more successful due to their greater number of resources, the government's willingness to censor media, and their interconnectivity with the Western and Pacific theaters. The sheer volume of written, visual, and electric technologies stoked the collective Northern spirit, allowing the North to be more effective media manipulators than the South and ultimately aiding in achieving a Union victory.

It is vital to understand the importance of the media in shaping the nation's opinion and morale. This ability of media to mold public perception should not be overlooked when it comes to the effectiveness of the Union's Civil War campaign. The media was able to make battles that, for all intents and purposes, were tactical draws and turn them into wins, convincingly so at times. By boasting about victory at battles like Antietam and Gettysburg, the Northern media was able to convince many citizens that the Union had recorded dominant victories. This provided reason to carry on and hope for a quick conclusion to the war. Just as importantly, they were able to soften the blow after Union defeats. At Fredericksburg, the Northern media proved itself more than capable of turning a major loss into a minor setback. The media was able to quell the fears of many with a multitude of explanations as to why the Union did not win that battle. These explanations provided civilians with hope that the loss was due to a series of unfortunate circumstances and bad luck that were not likely to be repeated again in the future.

Many media outlets were able to conjure up enough reasoning to keep the citizenry from becoming unilaterally opposed to a war that, at the time, was seemingly, and pointlessly, dragging along.

But why is all of this so important today? What significance does this have in the present? Even today, the media still wields considerable influence. News manipulation occurs in much the same way today that it did during the Civil War. Compare how MSNBC and FOX News report their stories. The information is generally spun with a liberal bias for MSNBC and a conservative bias for FOX. Then consider people who regularly watch either of those networks, and see how their opinions are shaped by what they have seen. Although contemporary news consumers have the advantage of an endless stream of news sources to choose from, the average media user is more susceptible to persuasion and propaganda. Media spinning is still a very prevalent part of American culture. This form of slanted news reporting has been happening for more than 150 years. It is a topic of which Americans need to be more cognizant in understanding where their news comes from and what motives might be fueling the narratives their news provider offers. By asking questions and examining multiple news sources, media users can begin to sift through the biases that give an incomplete story or even a false story.

As a trained journalist, asking these questions still hold meaning for me: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? These questions are the basic building blocks for any twenty-first century journalist. But they should not only be used by the media. These six questions should also be used to examine the media, as well as to explore history. By taking this approach and using it as a lens to view media during the Civil War, we can gain a much better understanding of how the media, and its technologies, have shaped the country's opinion and morale.

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