

The Southern Loyalist

Excerpts from [The Southern Loyalist](#)

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So you think that just because you come from the south, your ancestors must have been Confederates? Richard Nelson Current, author of "Lincoln's Loyalists," estimates that as many as 100,000 white, Southern males wore the Blue instead of the Gray as regular soldiers or local militia. Did you know every state in the Confederacy except for South Carolina raised at least one unit for the Federal Army, for a total of 55 regiments?

Were these men patriots or were they, as some Southern historians such as William Stanley Hoole maintained, traitors to the Cause? Who were these men who risked so much to remain loyal to "the Old Flag, sealed with the blood of our forefathers?" Were they uneducated hill folk, or were they sophisticated anti-slavery and anti-plantation visionaries? Arkansas was a border state and one of the last to secede. Loyalties were very divided and many families had members fighting on both sides. When Arkansas joined the Confederacy on May 6, 1861, many people joined regiments and fought throughout the War for the south. Others left the state and fought for the North in regiments from Missouri when it became clear it was not going to leave the Union. In Alabama, for example, of 52 counties, 23 voted to remain within the Union. These counties lay mostly within the Appalachian Highlands of northern Alabama, and this division was one that was repeated everywhere within the South. The people of the uplands were pro-Union, and the people of the plantation areas represented the fire-eaters of the Confederacy. Where plantations ruled, slavery held sway, and the Confederacy was strong. Where free men tilled the soil, slavery, slaves, the Confederacy, and

most particularly the Planters, were not popular. On the coastal lowlands of North Carolina, where the people earned their living by fishing and commerce, lumbering and other enterprises that were inimical to the slave labor economy, the people tended to remain loyal to the nation their forefathers had fought to build.

The mountain area in western Virginia and eastern Tennessee was one of the major hotbeds of Unionism. Virginia, arguably the very heart of the Confederacy, was split along lines similar to those seen in Alabama. The people of the mountain counties of Virginia remained so solidly Union that they petitioned to be admitted as a separate state in 1863. Tennessee was perhaps the most split of the states voting to secede and sent approximately equal numbers to each Army. As mentioned by Sam Watkins, the First Tennessee, the regiment that stood Sherman's assaults on the Dead Line at Kennesaw Mountain all alone and saying they needed no help, had Union sympathizers in its ranks.

Tennessee was a bitterly divided state, and considerable efforts were expended by both sides either to deny the military resources to the enemy or to tap them. East Tennessee, particularly, was a hotbed of Union sentiment, and no one was more vigorous in the cause than Andrew Johnson. Johnson had campaigned vigorously in East Tennessee prior to the secession vote. A friend of Johnson's, James T.T. Carter, an Annapolis graduate and lieutenant in the US Navy, was detailed from the Navy to drill troops in East Tennessee. Carter, incidentally, was the only American to hold the ranks of Major General and Rear Admiral.

All over the South, the pattern of Tennessee was repeated. In North Carolina, a number of regiments were raised on the coast and in the highlands. Even Georgia sent a regiment near the end of the war. In Arkansas, the main problem was with equipping volunteers. Surprisingly, Louisiana was also a hotbed of loyalist sentiment. The Cajun population,

particularly, held no love for the planters and enlisted in Union units in considerable numbers. The Irish, German and Yankees of New Orleans saw the Confederate cause as treason, and when Butler and Farragut steamed up the Mississippi in April, 1862, the dragooned men holding Ft. Jackson were such unwilling conscripts that they spiked their guns and shot the officers who wouldn't agree to surrender. The fort fell without a Union shot being fired.

If a brigade of Federals could have worked their way through Indian Territory to West Texas and the Hill Country, Texas would undoubtedly have returned to the Union. Sam Houston, the governor at the time of the secession vote, had done everything legal and illegal he could manage to keep Texas in the Union. The German immigrants saw no advantages to the Confederacy. Even today, few of the courthouses in areas settled by Germans display the ubiquitous Confederate infantryman on the square. The Hispanic population in Texas was solidly Unionist, and a number of irregular units were formed. These units were most unreliable, however, because Mexico started its own civil war about that time, and these men had the bad habit of taking their equipment further South. The situation in Texas was particularly bitter. More than a hundred Unionists were hanged for their loyalty. Every state of the Confederacy except for South Carolina sent at least one regiment of white men to the Union Army. Mississippi contributed the First Mississippi Mounted Rifles, though the unit never filled completely. Florida contributed the First and Second Florida Cavalry. Georgia contributed the First Georgia Battalion. Many other Georgia men enlisted in Tennessee units or the First Alabama, as did nearly 100 South Carolinians and 300 Mississippi men.

PART II. Who Were These Men

Why were some men of the South vehement supporters of the

Union, while other Southerners rallied to the Stars and Bars? Very few Unionists owned slaves, but, then, very few ordinary Confederate soldiers were slave-holders, either. Throughout the South, only one family in three owned as much as a single slave. Examination of the 1860 census for Washington County, NC, which furnished roughly equal numbers of men to each army, showed the average Union soldier owned only \$269 in personal property. The average Confederate soldier owned \$3,759, but is this an example of the fallacy of the mean? None of the Unionist heads of household reported more than \$1000 in family income, while a couple of dozen Confederates did. All but one of the Unionists was a landowner, while 19 of the Confederates were landless. After all, the mean of one million dollars and one hundred dollars is \$500,050.

Close examination showed the Confederates of Washington County to be large planters and their dependents, their sons, the merchants with whom they dealt, the lawyers and clergymen they patronized, and the poor white men who worked as day laborers, an alliance of the very rich and the very poor. The division between Unionist and Secessionist was not simply between rich and poor. The middle class that had no economic interest in the slave economy tended to be solidly Unionist, and why not? These Middle-class folk themselves were oppressed economically by the system. Moreover, they tended to be mightily offended by the airs put on by the planters, who tended to see themselves as a privileged aristocracy.

PART III. The Fighting Southern Federals

What was the impact of the Southern Loyalists? Three factors need to be considered; the direct contribution of the men as soldiers to the Union cause, the resources expended by the Confederacy to counter the threat, and finally, the loss of manpower to the Southern cause. Taking these in reverse order, the loss of manpower to the South was probably fatal to its

cause. While estimates of the numbers differ. Current estimates that as many as 100,000 white men of the South served the Union cause as Federal forces and local defense forces. This was more men than Lee or any other Southern commander ever had under arms at any time. In addition, thousands of other troops were diverted from the main armies to control the loyalists. Cavalry patrols. How much difference would the cavalry patrols that tried to interdict the flow of manpower have made to the cavalry-poor army of Johnston?

Consider the impact of the 30,000 East Tennesseans who joined the Union. Had they joined the Confederate forces, this would have amounted to a swing of 60,000 men, and when the 10,000 Confederates who were required to keep East Tennessee in subjugation are added in, a difference of 70,000 men results.

Finally, there is the direct contribution. There is no question that some of the southern units were hard-fighting, crack units, while others were of questionable value. The Tennessee Unionists units were of solid quality, as were most of the Virginia units, who saw fighting almost from the beginning at Philippi and Romney under McClellan. The First Mississippi Mounted Infantry rode with Grierson in his famous raid through the heart of Mississippi. In the movie "The Horse Soldiers" with John Wayne and William Holden, the Southern-speaking men (Ken Curtis) were authentic and represented the First Mississippi. It is true that when Pickett executed 22 men of the First North Carolina USV, he did, in fact, cut the heart out of some units, particularly those containing "galvanized Yankees." Still, these men could, and did, perform valuable duty in less exposed positions.

Other Unionists such as the First Alabama were dependable units, just as hard-fighting as any Ohio, Maine, or Pennsylvania troops. The Myth of the Lost Cause demands the loyalists be branded as poor soldiers. Interestingly, many of the Unionists served in cavalry units, and early in the war, the quality of the Union cavalry in general was very poor. But

by 1864, the Federal cavalry were, in general, at least equal to the Confederates. The hard-riding Blue troopers of Phil Sheridan scattered Jeb Stuart's plumed cavaliers and killed the famed cavalryman. While they never tamed "that devil Forrest", the Union cavalry in general, and the First Alabama did humble Joe Wheeler and Wade Hampton.

PART IV. The Fate of the Southern Unionists During Reconstruction

The fate of the Southern Unionists began to be clear with the massacre at Ft. Pillow, where Forrest's men massacred a number of white soldiers of the 13th Tennessee Cavalry. The commanding officer, Maj. Bradford, was shot after he had surrendered and was being taken to Forrest's headquarters at Jackson, TN. Yet, Ft. Pillow is remembered mainly for the massacre of black soldiers. Both Congress and Lincoln were forgetting the Tennessee loyalists, and forgotten they are today. Yet, these men risked more for their nation than did the men of the North, for they risked execution on capture and consigned their families to the often not-so-tender mercies of their often unforgiving neighbors.

In part, they fell into obscurity because Lincoln saw the African-American population as representing a larger manpower resource, and after the war, the Radical Republicans sought to consolidate their power through the freed slaves rather than the Southern Unionists. There were some exceptions. Col. Spencer, commander of the First Alabama, was elected governor and then Senator, and was the only Republican re-elected to the Senate. Nonetheless, he ended up his years in Nevada, leaving Alabama for a variety of reasons.

Reconstruction under the Act of 1867 brought temporary relief, but the loyalists, like all Southerners, had been impoverished by the War. The Southern economy was in shambles, and the

industrial powers of the North quickly established their economic hegemony. Until the late 1940's Southern goods moving north paid a higher price on the railroads than Northern goods moving South or Southern raw materials moving north. Moreover, the white loyalists felt alienated in the Republican Party, which tended to give more emphasis to the needs of the freed slaves than to the loyal whites. One of the tenets of Northern industry was to divide and conquer, and by setting black against white, a reservoir of cheap labor could be guaranteed. Additionally, the often corrupt and inefficient "Carpetbagger-Scalawag" governments did little to help Southerners of any color or loyalty, preferring to line their own pockets. Finally, as racial divisions emerged in the South, the loyalists saw how they finally would have to decide their political loyalties, and so they submerged into the white culture virtually without a trace.

This is a condensed version of "[The Southern Loyalist](#)" for more detailed information, follow the link.