

2010

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## Recommended Citation

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**Into the Hands of Brothers: The Union  
Occupation of Chattanooga and Nashville**

Ryan Thurber

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## Into the Hands of Brothers: The Union Occupation of Chattanooga and Nashville<sup>1</sup>

An occupying army is not a docile houseguest. During the Civil War, the Union Army fought to cripple the Confederate war machine and force their army into a confrontation. But wars do not happen in a vacuum. There is land that must be fought over, supplies that must be delivered, and noncombatants whose lives are changed forever by the course of a war they otherwise would have had little to do with. How an army relates to these noncombatants—in the case of the Civil War Southern citizens, refugees, and runaway slaves—is of the utmost importance both to the outcome of the war and the effort to rebuild society once the guns have stopped firing. It must be understood that the principal goal of any armed force is to win the war above all other objectives. As much as generals, especially modern ones, like to talk of winning the “hearts and minds” of the people, once combat begins, the two sides (as a professor of mine recently remarked) “put their heads down and do what it takes to win.” Throughout the Civil War, the Union Army wanted as little to do with the civilian population as possible.<sup>2</sup> Their only purpose

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<sup>1</sup> The work for this project could not possibly have been completed without the assistance of Dr. Darryl Black, of the Chattanooga Regional History Museum. His assistance was vital. In addition, I thank the research librarians at McKee Library, who so graciously allowed me regularly to peruse the stacks of the Lincoln Library. Finally, my thanks goes out to all those who were willing to read all or portions of my research and provided invaluable feedback along the way, especially my Research Methods professor, Dr. Lisa Diller.

<sup>2</sup> At this juncture, it is important to note that throughout the paper, the reader will find a good deal of what appears to be a pro-South bias, and, given the prevalence of Union examples and the harshness with which I treat certain practices, this is not necessarily surprising. This is, however, both unintentional and necessary. There are several explanations for this phenomenon. First, this paper represents a look only at Union Army policy and practice. During my research, I did find many examples of Confederate soldiers and officers committing many of the same atrocities you’ll find in these pages. However, it is important to note that the South did not and did not have to wage a war of occupation in the same manner as the North. The Confederacy fought to tire the Union, to force the North to give in to popular pressure to end a war that had taken too long and cost too much. As such, they did not occupy any Northern cities for any significant length of time, and because of this left no examples in the pattern of Nashville and Chattanooga to use for a case study. I sincerely hope

was to ensure that the noncombatants hindered the war effort as little as possible. To that end they handed control of civilian government back to the people, censored the pulpit and the press, dealt with troublesome citizens, and put the vast quantities of refugees who fled to Union lines to work. But regardless of good intentions, and at times even direct orders, the war effort and the needs of a hungry army always took precedence. This paper will examine the experience of the citizens of Chattanooga and Nashville during the Civil War in order to discern and evaluate U.S. Army policy on the treatment of private citizens.

Researching this project has introduced me to many authors whose work has proved valuable to me. On the topic of the battle of Chattanooga itself, Peter Cozzens' *The Shipwreck of Their Hopes* and James Lee McDonough's *Chattanooga: A Death Grip on the Confederacy* provided me with an excellent starting point, both in terms of potential sources and an overall view of the battle for Chattanooga. Both of these authors agree that the taking of Chattanooga was a watershed event during the Civil War and that its strategic importance was vital to securing Union victory.

For the remainder of my research, the portion devoted to life in Chattanooga and Nashville, there were several key works that I read thoroughly. Stephen Ash, in his book *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870*, offers an in-depth look at Nashville during the Civil War. Ash clearly shows the drastic effects war has on a city—focusing intently on the abuses the citizens suffered at the hands of the

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the reader will understand that it is not my intent to demonize one side of this conflict, but rather to illuminate the universal truth that war victimizes civilians and noncombatants—regardless of allegiance.

occupying armies. A second book by Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, also deals with the consequences of the Northern invasion.

On the subject of freedmen and of Camp Contraband, Benjamin Quarles is an influential author. His book *The Negro in the Civil War* focuses on the contributions of African-Americans during the war, including those of colored troops. Also helpful was John Cimprich's *Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865*, which deals more specifically with the problem of human contraband and the resolution of the army to deal with them.

Two works that I have found deal specifically with life in Chattanooga during the Civil War. The first of these is an article published in the *Journal of Southern History*, written by Gilbert Govan and James Livingood. The second work is a dissertation written by Charles McGehee, entitled *Wake of the Flood: A Southern City in the Civil War, Chattanooga, 1838-1873*. Both of these works conclude that Chattanooga was important during the Civil War and that the occupants had a unique experience based on the conditions and hardships they survived.

#### The Occupation of Nashville and Chattanooga

The focus of my research for this paper was not the battle for these cities themselves, but rather what happened to the cities after the Union Army took over. Still, it is important to discuss briefly how Nashville and Chattanooga came to be under Union power in order to more fully understand the transition that took place in these two cities. The battles and conquests have been discussed at far greater length and in better form than I attempt here, but what follows is a brief description of the history, importance, and fall of these two great Southern cities.

Nashville, at the outset of the Civil War, was the most important city in Middle Tennessee. This grandeur had not been accomplished overnight, however. Beginning around the turn of the nineteenth century, steamboat navigation on the Cumberland River brought trade and commerce to the area. As the years progressed, turnpikes and railroad brought even more business to the city.<sup>3</sup> By the time rebellion came, it was a prosperous, thriving city.

With the dawn of the 1860s, however, trouble loomed on the horizon for this great city. "Drought struck the heartland in the summer of 1860. Crops withered in the fields, harvest fell short, barns earlier crammed with surpluses emptied . . . . Reverberations sounded throughout the economy, bound as it was so intimately to the soil."<sup>4</sup> With the economic hardship came a new fear for the slaveholding Tennesseans—an insurrection. One planter wrote in February of 1861, that,

A servile rebellion . . . is more to be feared now than [it] was in the days of the Revolution against the mother country. *Then* there were no religious fanatics to urge our slave to deeds of rapine, murder, [etc.]—now the villainous blood hounds of Abolitionism will . . . turn loose upon us the very worse material in our midst.<sup>5</sup>

In response to this threat, the people of Nashville organized themselves into civilian patrols. These patrols used ruthless tactics to quell any action or behavior that might incite rebellion. Slaves or freedmen off the plantation without a pass were severely beaten and stripped naked. Even whites could be punished simply for "conversing with a negro."<sup>6</sup> The paranoia over an abolitionist-led slave rebellion

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<sup>3</sup> Steven V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870* (Baton Rouge (LA): Louisiana State UP, 1988), 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>5</sup> Qtd. in *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

doesn't seem to be rooted in reality.<sup>7</sup> But real threat or not, the citizens' belief in its existence created a pressure-packed situation in the city of Nashville.

When war finally did come, it was almost as though the people of Nashville experienced a release from the pressure that had been building over the past couple years. The city's young men flocked to the cause of the South. They organized and drilled and prepared to defend the home and country. Middle Tennessee became "an armed camp."<sup>8</sup> Once the war began, however, it quickly became apparent that hardships were ahead. The transportation lifelines that had brought Nashville so much prosperity were cut off. The government and military commandeered the railroads, and many of the commodities the citizens had been accustomed to were no longer available.<sup>9</sup>

For the Confederacy, Nashville was the most glorious city in the West. "Nashville was the chief depot for provisions and army stores for the whole of Secessia, and had the same importance to the Department of the West as Richmond for the East."<sup>10</sup> When the Union Army advanced into the rest of Tennessee and Georgia, Nashville served as its main base of supply.

The key to the fall of Nashville was Fort Donelson, the garrison of which surrendered to the North in February of 1862. A private letter from a citizen of Nashville described the reaction of the people.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on the sources I read, there was no evidence of an actual threat from abolitionists in the Nashville area. The exact source of this paranoia remained elusive to me. My best conjecture is that it had to do with Nashville's close proximity to the North.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>10</sup> Correspondent, "The Occupation of Nashville" *New York Times*.

Just as the church services were about to commence, there appeared at the door a messenger who said that "Fort Donelson surrendered at 5 o'clock this morning . . ." Then followed a rush—a tumult never before witnessed here. Such a hurrying to and fro . . . making their way to the depots of the Railroads leading southward.<sup>11</sup>

The arrival of the Union Army brought about an instantaneous reaction from the people. One observer described the scene, "The capital [Nashville] witnessed scenes hardly imaginable to its proud citizens . . . people were rushing madly about with their most valuable possessions in their arms . . . It was a surprise pandemonium . . . Hysterical women, half laughing, half crying, dragged their children behind them."<sup>12</sup> In the face of an incoming flood, the city erupted into chaos. "From the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, anarchy and rioting prevailed."<sup>13</sup>

The city of Nashville, as an important storage facility for the Confederate Army, housed vast stores of valuable weapons, ammunition, and raw materials. There was no time for the Confederate Army to recover them, so an alternative means of distribution was proposed. "Word was given out for the inhabitants to come and help themselves, which they did with a will."<sup>14</sup> The citizens descended immediately upon these storehouses. Of particular interest was the armory, where thousands of guns were stored. In a letter to a Northern friend, a Nashville resident describes the results. "Two thousand of the best were brought out . . . and burned, and the remainder given away to the little boys that chose to take them. My son

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<sup>11</sup> Nashville Resident to a "Judge Shankland," "The Occupation of Nashville," *New York Times*, March 1 1862.

<sup>12</sup> Qtd. in *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>13</sup> Nashville Resident to a "Judge Shankland," "The Occupation of Nashville," *New York Times*, March 1 1862.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



lugged home 17 of them."<sup>15</sup> By the time the Union Army arrived, there was precious little left in the storehouses.

With the Union Army holding the town, life changed immensely for residents of Nashville. A staff officer for the Union observed the conditions in the city proper:

[Nashville] was one of the brightest, most wealthy and prosperous cities of the Union, of all this she is now the exact reverse. Her finest buildings . . . . are now used as military hospitals and store-houses. Her streets are dirty . . . . Her suburbs are a mournful wreck . . . . As we write, the city of Nashville is stagnant, prostrate, and in the abject position of a subjugated city.<sup>16</sup>

When the anarchy ended, a sort of nervous peace settled on the city. "For nine days there was not a newspaper published in the city. We could hear nothing reliable, either from the North or the South . . . . After two weeks' suspension, some of the merchants have opened their stores."<sup>17</sup> The citizens had to adjust to life under the Union Army, and one of the first steps was the reestablishment of civic authority.

The fall of Nashville was one of the great early triumphs of the Western campaign. One article from the *New York Times* captured the feelings of Northern writers following the fall of Nashville, "By the possession of Nashville, taken in connection with our late occupation of Cumberland Gap, and Forts Henry and Donelson, we gain military possession of nearly the entire State of Tennessee."<sup>18</sup> Nashville held for the North significance beyond that of a rail depot. It was the first state capital to fall into Union hands, and a bustling city.

Both Chattanooga and Nashville were of very great strategic importance to the Union Army. The cities served as railway depots and supply stations as the blue

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Qtd in Ibid., 86.

<sup>17</sup> Correspondent, "The Occupation of Nashville," *New York Times*.

<sup>18</sup> Correspondent, "The City of Nashville," *New York Times*, February 25, 1862.

wave of Union occupation swept farther south. Chattanooga, for example, was especially important in the march toward Atlanta, as one author described it,

Why was he [Sherman] obliged to invade Georgia across this particularly rough and inhospitable landscape? The answer lay below him—a thin sinuous line of iron that ran from Chattanooga all the way to Atlanta: the Western and Atlantic Railroad . . . Atlanta was his goal, and only the Western and Atlantic would take him there.<sup>19</sup>

Railroads were of the utmost importance to a Civil War army. They were the lifeline through which supplies flowed, troops moved, and the wounded sought medical attention. Without a railroad lifeline, an army on the move faced starvation and shortages. As a gateway to the South, Chattanooga was especially vital to the Union cause.

Chattanooga, at the outset of the war, gave itself willingly to the Confederate cause—though there was some dissent among the population. Except for the cities of Chattanooga and Knoxville, the people of East Tennessee were largely pro-Union.<sup>20</sup> Thus the reception the Union Army received when they took Chattanooga was likely much more positive than the one they received in Nashville.

The key difficulty in holding Chattanooga, though it is a natural stronghold, is that it is incredibly easy to flank. Braxton Bragg, the commander of the Confederate forces at Chattanooga, knew this. And he ordered a hasty retreat just as the Union Army crossed the Tennessee River to threaten his supply lines.<sup>21</sup> General Bragg received much criticism for abandoning what appeared to the outside observer to be an unassailable position, but General John B. Gordon, a Confederate commander,

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<sup>19</sup> Lee Kennett, *Marching through Georgia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 10.

<sup>20</sup> Digby G. Seymour, *Divided Loyalties: Fort Sanders and the Civil War in East Tennessee* (Knoxville, U of Tenn P, 1963), 19.

<sup>21</sup> John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1903), 195.

defended his actions. "It would be the grossest injustice to General Bragg to hold him responsible for the failure to prevent General Rosecrans crossing the Tennessee. An army double the size of the one he commanded would have been wholly insufficient to cover the stretch of more than one hundred miles of river frontage."<sup>22</sup> Rather than a bloody struggle for possession of the strategic town, General Bragg quietly abandoned Chattanooga before his lines of supply were cut—and General Rosecrans set up his command on September 9, 1863.<sup>23</sup>

By the end of 1863, the Union Army held two of the most strategically advantageous cities in the Western theater. The marked difference between the captures of Nashville and Chattanooga –pandemonium in the former and relative calm in the latter—is startling, but understandable. Because Nashville was the first state capital to fall into Union hands, it was the first to experience full-scale Union occupation, a concept unfamiliar to its citizens. Another explanation is the general enmity felt toward the Rebellion, to which Northern columnist alludes when he writes: "The melancholy appearances presented on all sides in the thoroughly rebellious City of Nashville, are enough to convince anyone of the terrible consequences which a people can bring upon themselves by plunging into treason against their lawful Government."<sup>24</sup> Finally, though Chattanooga, at the start of the war, readily went to the Confederate side, the presence of pro-Union mountainfolk in East Tennessee probably meant a warmer welcome for Union troops when they arrived.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>24</sup> Correspondent, "Department of the Cumberland," *New York Times*, December 26, 1862.

### Logistical Needs and Internal Policy

As the Union Army marched South, toward its ultimate goal of ending the Confederacy, its logistical needs grew ever greater. Supply lines were stretched thin, and the longer they grew, the harder it was to adequately supply the massive force of the Army of the Cumberland. In order to keep the war machine rolling, the army was forced to locate other sources of supplies. This had dire implications for the people of the South, as any resource necessary to the war effort was fair game. There were three primary concerns for the Union Army: food, fuel, and shelter, and the people of the South would supply all three.

The first concern for the Union Army was feeding its soldiers. The old adage about an army marching on its stomach held true for the Army of the Cumberland. An occupying army is a barely contained mass of men held together by discipline and the scruples of its officers. Hunger removes such restraints, and it isn't long before the common people begin to feel the effects of the soldiers' hunger.

In order to satisfy the need for food, the army resorted to stealing from the local farms. Joseph McCallie, a member of the well-known McCallie family of Chattanooga, was a small boy when war broke out, but he remembered foraging soldiers well:

My father, Andrew Jackson McCallie, a well-to-do farmer, lived on a road repeatedly traveled by the soldiers of both armies. As a result, our fine new white house held nothing that was safe. Soldiers of both sides were continually passing the house, what Confederates left, the Federals took.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph M. McCallie, *A Farm Boy in East Tennessee 1863-1882* Ed. Katherine McCallie Brubeck (Winston-Salem (NC): KM Brubeck, 1985), 1.

A newspaper article printed in Chattanooga just before the Union Army took over corroborates his story. "Accounts from the north bank of the Cumberland report that the Yankees are destroying all farming implements and foraging the whole country. The inhabitants are compelled to hide their provisions."<sup>26</sup> Even before the Union Army arrived and occupied Chattanooga, the needs of a hungry army forced the citizens to either hide their food or give it up to the Union cause.

The people were continually called upon to provide for the armies. The situation in Nashville was even worse than in Chattanooga. As the central supply depot for the Union Army in Tennessee, Nashville's farms and storehouses were veritably emptied in support of the Union cause. According to one Indiana soldier, "When we have eaten a place empty we go a few miles further and take everything there we can find."<sup>27</sup>

This devastation was not, however, limited just to the Union Army. Union sympathizers in Confederate-controlled areas were harassed and forced to give up their livelihoods in many of the same ways.<sup>28</sup> Wherever an army camped, the local citizens paid the price in crops, livestock, and whatever else wasn't battened down.

Armies need food, and during the Civil War the Union Army supplied itself by taking what it needed from the farms and homes they came across. The hunt to satisfy material needs took precedence over property rights and concern for Southern citizens.

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<sup>26</sup> Correspondent, "Reports from Chattanooga" *New York Times*, March 29, 1863.

<sup>27</sup> Steven V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1988), 86-87.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

But food was not the only resource in scarce supply as the army marched South. The second source of particular concern to the occupying armies was finding sufficient quantities of fuel. During the Civil War, wood was the primary source, and in the face of thousands of daily needs, available resources quickly ran out. Wood was especially scarce in Chattanooga, which was besieged for weeks by the Confederate Army. According to General Grant, the army solved this problem in a unique way:

The fuel within the Federal lines [at Chattanooga] was exhausted, even to the stumps of trees. There were no teams to draw it from the opposite bank, where it was abundant. The only way of supplying fuel, for some time before my arrival, had been to cut trees on the north bank of the river at a considerable distance up the stream, form rafts of it and float it down with the current, effecting a landing on the south side within our lines by the use of paddles or poles. It would then be carried on the shoulders of the men to their camps.<sup>29</sup>

A more common method of securing lumber for fuel was found in stealing fence railing from local farms. The problem with this practice is that fences are vital to successful farming. More than simply marking property lines, they keep livestock in and protect crops from scavenging animals. Though the officers attempted to curb this practice—seeing that it would no doubt embitter the local population—there was an unfortunate flaw in their reasoning, as McCallie describes:

When passing soldiers camped on the McCallie farm, they were ordered by their officers to use only the top rails of fences for their campfires. Every rail was a top rail, after the one above it was taken off. As a consequence, all the rails of the fences were burned without disobeying orders.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *The Civil War Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* Ed. Brian M. Thomson (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2002), 256.

<sup>30</sup> McCallie, *A Farm Boy in East Tennessee*, 4.

One newspaper reported that “There is not a fence [with]in a dozen miles of town,” and that individual houses were being torn down to satisfy the need for firewood.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the methods used, the effects remained the same. The soldiers needed fires for cooking and warmth, and they sought fuel by whatever means necessary.

Finally, the necessity of providing care for all of the wounded troops placed an extra strain on the people and facilities of Nashville and Chattanooga. Many of Nashville’s public buildings provided the space for thousands of wounded men who straggled back from the front lines. According to a *New York Times* correspondent, “The accommodations in the hospitals here, for the wounded and otherwise disabled, are very extensive and complete. Roomy and airy buildings, kept thoroughly clean, good beds, attentive nurses, wholesome fare, intelligent surgeons for the most part . . . .”<sup>32</sup> Though the correspondent might have been exaggerating the pleasantness of the hospital accommodations, there is no doubt there was plenty of room—the list of all of the buildings pressed into service is staggering. Among them were several old gun factories, a couple of local high schools, at least two university buildings, and the Planters’ and Broadway hotels. At least two churches also made the list. In all, twenty-four buildings were converted into care facilities for the wounded. For the Northern army, any building or facility with enough space was fair game in the quest to continue the war effort. Fortunately for the owners, in

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<sup>31</sup> Correspondent, “From Chattanooga,” *Marietta (Chattanooga) Rebel*, reprinted in the *New York Times*, January 10, 1864.

<sup>32</sup> Correspondent, “Affairs in Tennessee,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1863.

the summer months of 1865 the buildings were allowed to return to their original function.<sup>33</sup>

Chattanooga was a much smaller city than Nashville, with an estimated 5,000 inhabitants at the outbreak of the war.<sup>34</sup> The transformation of this city into a military outpost immediately changed the atmosphere of the city. One newspaper described the conditions:

Tents gleam on every side. Patrols, tramping troops, the clatter of hoofs, the ceaseless rolling of countless wheels, the hot haste, the noisy activity, the clouds of dust, the incessant scream and thunder of railroad trains, for sights, sounds and experiences which those at Chattanooga now find more striking than agreeable.<sup>35</sup>

What had once been a city surrounded by natural splendor and an easygoing atmosphere had been turned into a military camp. As in Nashville, many of the city's prominent buildings were converted for military purposes. Sheds and other buildings were fortified, and musket holes were cut into their sides. Also changed were the Western and Atlantic railroad depot, which was turned into a commissary, and the Bank of Chattanooga, which became the Provost Marshal's office. Private residences, too, were taken over by the army as headquarters.<sup>36</sup>

Here, too, it can be seen that the Union Army followed a policy of "war effort first." Any building deemed necessary to the war was quickly confiscated to make room for the army. Admirably, however, once the war was over, and the buildings no longer had any strategic value, the Union Army made preparations to turn the

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<sup>33</sup> J. Woolridge, ed., *History of Nashville Tennessee* (Nashville: Charles Elder, 1970), 204.

<sup>34</sup> Correspondent, "News from the South," *Richmond Sentinel*, reprinted in the *New York Times*, October 4, 1863.

<sup>35</sup> Correspondent, "From Nashville," *New York Times*, June 6, 1864.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



city over once again to civilian control. The waterworks the army had built were sold off; the army-constructed bridge was given to the city. The rolling mill was sold at auction for \$175,000. The army quartermasters took care to repair the churches and hand them back over to the congregations.<sup>37</sup> Of particular importance is the fact that the railroads were returned to their original owners and repaired.<sup>38</sup> During the war, however, the army commandeered any buildings necessary for the war effort.

Whatever the resource in question, the Union Army followed the same general policy. Whatever was deemed necessary to continue the war became the army's top priority—even over winning the support of the Southern citizens. Food, fuel, and shelter were all-important to the war effort, and the soldiers would do anything to procure them. But, at the very least, the army did make a post-war effort to return buildings and land to their rightful owners, even rebuilding them in some cases, like they did in Chattanooga, which had been besieged by the Confederates for weeks.

#### External Policy

Not all of the Union Army's interactions with the people of the South centered on a fundamental need for the war effort. Despite the army's desire to focus on winning the war, it found itself faced with numerous other nuisances, such as preachers who encouraged their parishioners to disobey the Union, rogue newspapers, unruly citizens, and thousands of refugees and runaway slaves who

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<sup>37</sup> Govan, "Chattanooga Under Military Occupation," 40.

<sup>38</sup> This is particularly important because Chattanooga's primary strategic purpose during the Civil War was, in fact, to serve as a railway station. It lies at the intersection of four very important railroads, which served the entire Union Army.; James R. Sullivan, *Chickamauga and Chattanooga Battlefields* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1961), 2.

flocked to the Union lines in search of safety. How the army dealt with these distractions would have a tremendous impact on the war effort, and the Army of the Cumberland would not be deterred. In general, it followed a policy of deference to local authorities and minimal confrontation . The first step in the long process of dealing with civilians was the reestablishment of local government.

When Andrew Johnson was made military governor of Tennessee by President Lincoln, one of his primary concerns was the reestablishment of civilian government in a pattern favorable to the Union cause. The city government in Nashville, for example, was allowed to retain many of its prewar functions—but not without a plan in place to ensure their loyalty. Upon taking office in the new government, all new political officials were made to swear the following oath of loyalty:

We do solemnly swear, each and every one of us, that we will support, protect, and defend the Constitution and Government of the United States against all enemies, whether domestic or foreign, and that we will bear true faith and allegiance and loyalty to the same, any law, ordinance, or convention to the contrary notwithstanding; and further that we will well and faithfully perform all the duties which may be required of us by law—so help me God.<sup>39</sup>

Andrew Johnson may have desired to return local government to the people, as he often ordered the Union officers in charge of conquered cities to do, but he did so only to the extent that this oath allowed: no deviation from true faith and devotion to the Union cause. A reinstated civilian government, however, was actually a very good thing for the army, as they no longer had to worry about city administration or controlling the population.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 195.

The newly reinstated government had its hands full trying to handle all of the different problems that arose from the new status quo. All of the tasks of a normal civic government were magnified and increased as the city council set out to take care of the poor, provide food for the countless refugees, and bury the dead. The Union Army assisted in many of these endeavors, but the majority of the burden rested on the city government.<sup>40</sup> One of the problems for the fledgling government was the lack of funds available for important institutions like education. In 1862, the city council went bankrupt and shut down the public school system.<sup>41</sup> All of these problems the Union Army would have had to deal with if they hadn't sought to reinstate civilian government.

Chattanooga lost control of civic government when the mayor of Chattanooga, Dr. Milo Smith, turned control over to the first Federal unit to enter the town.<sup>42</sup> From my research, I found no evidence to suggest that he was a Union sympathizer. One can infer from his actions that he simply wanted a smooth transition of power with as little bloodshed as possible—which is, more or less, what happened. The army ruled as a military government until elections could be held to elect a civilian government. This transfer proved more difficult than Johnson imagined, however. In the election of March 1864, only 75 voters from all of Hamilton County turned out to cast their ballot.<sup>43</sup> Despite the lackluster numbers, civic control was returned to the people, and the army had one less distraction to worry about.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>42</sup> Govan, "Chattanooga Under Military Occupation," 23.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 37.

Another concern for the Union Army was the influence the churches and preachers had over the local population. A newspaper correspondent reflected on the Union attitude towards Southern preachers, whose “desecrated pulpits and traitorous ministry used to send up blasphemous prayers to heaven for the success for the rebel arms.”<sup>44</sup> Preachers who failed to preach Union-slanted sermons found themselves either out of work, or worse, locked away in a prison. Members of the clergy were forced to take the Oath of Allegiance to the Federal Government. If they refused, the consequences could be dire. In one particular circumstance, six pastors were instructed to take the oath. After contemplating the matter for a few days, they refused to do so. Five of the six were promptly imprisoned until arrangements could be made to exile them further south. The sixth was granted parole only because he was old and in poor health.<sup>45</sup> In one extreme example involving the Second Presbyterian Church, a group of elders (cooperating with the Union Army) occupied the church sanctuary and seized control of the building. The congregation at the start of the war had removed these elders, but now they returned with a vengeance to ensure the Second Presbyterian flock took to the Union cause. The Union Army most certainly recognized the important role that religion played in maintaining social order, and it sought from the very beginning to control the pulpit. Notice, however, that the army did not close churches or arrest parishioners; rather, they sought to control the influence of religion on Southern society in the most efficient way possible—through the clergy.

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<sup>44</sup> Correspondent, “Department of the Cumberland,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1862.

<sup>45</sup> Woolridge, *History of Nashville*, 196.

Another source of distraction of the Union Army was the influence of pro-Southern newspapers. Before radio, television, and the Internet, the newspaper was the only source of news and information the people had. Whoever controlled the press controlled, to a large extent, the minds of the local population. The press in Chattanooga underwent a serious transformation at the time of occupation. The pro-South newspaper, the *Chattanooga Rebel*, relocated itself further south, to Atlanta and Marietta, Georgia, to escape censorship.<sup>46</sup> In its place, enterprising pro-Union papers moved in to fill the void left by the *Rebel*. As early as February 1864, a new newspaper was up and running in Chattanooga.<sup>47</sup> The army also employed the printing press left behind by the *Rebel*, using it to print its own orders and papers, much to the former owners' chagrin.<sup>48</sup> The Union Army dealt quickly and efficiently with this distraction as well.

The press in Nashville offers an even more striking example. Once Nashville was occupied, the newspapers currently in print (the *Patriot* and the *Banner*) did moderate their message somewhat, but the new editorial policy was not enough to satisfy Governor Johnson. He ordered the two papers shut down, but offered the staff of the *Patriot* the opportunity to work on a new Union paper to be called the *Daily Union*. They leapt at the opportunity to keep their jobs and became, at least on paper, some of the most pro-Union people in Nashville. The *Daily Union* didn't fare well at first, but eventually the attitude of the city began to change and the paper

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<sup>46</sup> Correspondent, "From Chattanooga," *New York Times*, January 10, 1864.

<sup>47</sup> Correspondent, "Letter from Nashville," *New York Times*, February 22, 1864.

<sup>48</sup> Correspondent, "From Chattanooga," *Marietta (Chattanooga) Rebel*, reprinted in the *New York Times*, January 10, 1864.

grew in popularity.<sup>49</sup> As the city grew used to Union occupation, the pro-South sentiments of the population mellowed, and the *Daily Union* gradually enjoyed relative acceptance.

Institutions like the churches and newspapers were not the only sources of trouble for the Union Army. Individual citizens, at times, posed a serious problem for the army. It is in the treatment of Southern citizens on a more individual level that a darker side of Union treatment of civilians is exposed.

One of the ways the Union sought out dangerous individuals was by turning the people against each other. The pre-war concern with an Abolitionist rebellion evolved into a brutal struggle between the private citizens of Nashville. No Southern-sympathizing citizens were safe from the probing eyes of the Union Army. Local citizens who gave themselves to the Union cause aided the anti-subversion efforts of the army. The loyal Confederates referred to them as "Tories."<sup>50</sup> Albert Goodloe, a Confederate soldier whose home was in Nashville, described the conditions:

They would luxuriate in an opportunity to report a Confederate soldier to the nearest Yankee garrison in order that he might be captured or shot; and they were ever watchful for an occasion to have their Southern sympathizing neighbors robbed by the Yankees, burned out, imprisoned, or murdered  
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Even when the consequences weren't as severe, the "Tories" would look for any opportunity to turn a Southern sympathizer over to the Union. The army would

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<sup>49</sup> Correspondent, "Letter from Nashville," *New York Times*, February 22, 1864.

<sup>50</sup> Albert T. Goodloe, *Confederate Echoes: A Soldier's Personal Story of Life in the Confederate Army From the Mississippi to the Carolinas* (Washington: Zenger, 1983), 332.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

then proceed to take everything they owned, and, on some occasions, torch the property.<sup>52</sup> The result of this paranoia was that it was impossible for someone living in the city to know at any given time who was his friend and who was his enemy.

Strongly indicative of the Union's practice of war first is a story from wartime Nashville involving two private citizens. On February 18, 1863, two of Nashville's wealthiest citizens were arrested by the Union Army and held as hostages. The ransom for these two men, whose only crime was being prominent pro-South citizens, was two Union soldiers held by the Confederates at (not yet Union-controlled) Chattanooga.<sup>53</sup> For the sake of the war, the Union Army used private citizens to accomplish military objectives.

In addition to imprisonment, private citizens also faced the possibility of deportation. The conquering Union Army did not take kindly to the pro-Southern attitudes of the citizens of Chattanooga, and, according to the editor of the *Chattanooga Gazette*, the commanding officers wasted no time in rectifying the situation. "General Steedman ordered some of the townspeople sent to 'a cooler climate.'"<sup>54</sup> In fact, if citizens wished to stay in the city at all, they had to register with the Provost-Marshal and take an oath of loyalty. Anyone who broke this oath

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Correspondent, "News from Nashville," *New York Times*, February 19, 1863.

<sup>54</sup> Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood. "Chattanooga under Military Occupation," *The Journal of Southern History*. (OL .XVII, No. 1 February, 1951), 29.

could be fined up to \$10,000.<sup>55</sup> By deporting the more vocal supporters of the Confederacy, the Union ensured that the city would remain loyal in an efficient way.

Another distraction for the Union Army came in the form of thousands of people flocking to their lines. The influx of refugees from the countryside and plantations presented an enormous challenge for the people of Chattanooga. One newspaper correspondent, who made the journey from Nashville to Chattanooga, remarked on the condition of some refugees he found just outside the latter city:

But we stop a moment to look at one of the most painful scenes of this war. On the floor of a large old mill . . . are seated hardly less than a score of women and children, huddling closely together to avoid the chilly air. They are "Refugees," a name which has a deeper significance in East Tennessee than in any other country in the world . . . Their condition is most wretched; with scarce clothing enough to cover their limbs, with only the damp floor to lie upon, and a small bundle of scanty bedding, dependent upon the bounty of the soldiers, and with the memory of a home in blackened ruins to haunt their dreams . . . They gaze at us as we pass, with a pitiful mercy-seeking expression in the pallid faces.<sup>56</sup>

These refugees placed a huge strain on the local economy and citizens.

But not all of those who fled to Chattanooga were refugees of war.

Thousands of slaves fled the plantations and sought out the Union Army. Runaway slaves had an important role to play in the progress of the war effort. As the Civil War progressed, and the Union Army moved deeper and deeper into Confederate territory; the slaves in the South listened to the progress with baited breath.

According to one newspaper editor in Chattanooga, "The spirits of the colored citizens rise and fall with the ebb and flow of this tide of blue devils, and when they

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<sup>55</sup> Correspondent, "From Chattanooga," *Marietta (Chattanooga) Rebel*, reprinted in the *New York Times*, January 10, 1864.

<sup>56</sup> Correspondent, "Our Special Correspondence," *New York Times*, October 29, 1863.



are glad as larks, the whites are depressed and go about the streets like mourners."<sup>57</sup> As the Union Army drew near, many slaves abandoned the plantations to make for the Union lines and what they thought would be freedom. The first Union generals to enter the South feared that by taking in these runaways they would soon be overwhelmed.<sup>58</sup> The problem was limited not only to the land forces—the Northern Navy also had to deal with runaways swimming out to their ships and devouring the already rationed stores.<sup>59</sup> Runaways became a tremendous problem for the already stretched Union armies.

When Andrew Johnson was given control of the conquered territory in Tennessee, he issued an order that promised to honor state law and respect slaveholders' property rights. This proclamation created enormous tension between the Union Army and the governor, as the runaway slaves provided a tremendous boost to the army in both manpower and logistics.<sup>60</sup> The new work force took care of all of the little chores that make an army run smoothly—like washing dishes, transporting goods, and organizing supplies.

The solution, according to the War Department, was to declare runaway slaves who made it to the Union lines "contraband," thereby maintaining their status as property for the duration of the war while putting off the tough subject of where they stood in society until a later date.<sup>61</sup> The first Union officer to utilize this loophole was General Benjamin F. Butler, who also set up relief stations and schools

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<sup>57</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1979) 27.

<sup>58</sup> John Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865* (University (AL): U of Alabama P, 1985) 33.

<sup>59</sup> Steven J. Ramold, *Slaves, Sailors, Citizens*. (Dekalb (IL), Northern Illinois UP, 2002) 36-37.

<sup>60</sup> Cimprich, 33.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

for the contraband.<sup>62</sup> But early efforts at organization proved insufficient. With the overwhelming number of slaves that poured North, a more formal organization was needed to organize the masses. In November of 1862, John Eaton was selected by General Ulysses S. Grant to take charge of all the freedmen in Tennessee.<sup>63</sup>

The Union reaction to the formal harboring of runaway slaves was a mixture of confusion and prejudice. According to Eaton's account,

Before entering the South, few Yankee soldiers had ever seen so many blacks, such concentrations of them, appearing almost everywhere they marched. The tens of thousands who greeted them along the roadsides, the "contrabands" who flocked to their camps, the refugees who followed their columns, the sullen-looking figures who gazed at them from a distance provided most Union soldiers with their initial view of the "peculiar institution."<sup>64</sup>

Many in the Union Army had never before witnessed the results of slavery firsthand. Unfortunately, not every Union soldier came to the South equipped with abolitionist motives, and mistreatment of the runaways was common—especially of black women. Many Union officers took freedwomen as concubines, and the common soldiers also took them as companions. Eventually, the problem grew out of control. "The frequency with which common soldiers mixed with black women prompted some regimental commanders to order the ejection of such women from the camp because their presence had become 'demoralizing.'"<sup>65</sup> This mistreatment continued even after the war was over, affecting the established schools for freed slaves to the point that some had to be shut down. Some schools and churches were

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<sup>62</sup> Henry L. Swint, ed., *Dear Ones at Home: Letters from Contraband Camps* (Nashville (TN): Vanderbilt UP, 1966) 1.

<sup>63</sup> John Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Negro Universities P, 1969) xvi.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

even burned down to prevent blacks from attending. This interference encouraged the government to stay involved in the protection of freedmen.<sup>66</sup>

The runaway slaves who concentrated themselves near the Tennessee River were of particular concern. It was estimated by the census taker that there were as many as 4,000 living in "Contraband," as the Union Army had named the camp.<sup>67</sup>

The conditions in the camps were pitiful, as this description of a family hut demonstrates:

The hut was built of rails and mud; the chimney of sticks and sun-dried bricks, surmounted by a barrel. The roof was of split slabs. There was a slab mantel-piece crowded with bottles and cans; a shelf in one corner devoted to plates, cups, and mugs. I noticed also in the room a table, a bed, a bunk, a cupboard, a broom without a handle, two stools, and a number of pegs on which clothing was hung. All this within a space not much more than a dozen feet square.<sup>68</sup>

The runaways packed along the Tennessee faced a daily challenge to provide food for their families and earn a living.

But they did not have to manage this task alone. In the face of these hardships, the inhabitants of Contraband banded together to provide a future for their children. With the help of missionaries from the North and various charitable organizations, a school was established in Contraband. By the end of the war, the school was fully self-supporting, with around 600 students attending classes. Each student was charged one dollar per month for tuition, and parents mandated attendance. According to the school's superintendent, "The colored people are far more zealous in the cause of education than the whites. They will starve

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<sup>66</sup> Paul Skeels Peirce, *The Freedmen's Bureau: A Chapter in the History of Reconstruction* (New York: Haskell House, 1971) 80.

<sup>67</sup> Govan, "Chattanooga Under Military Occupation," 37.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

themselves, and go without clothes, in order to send their children to school.”<sup>69</sup> Even in the midst of war, the population of Contraband sought to care for their own.

For the relatively small size of the community of Chattanooga, an extra 4,000 people represents a near doubling of the pre-war population. Many of these individuals did not leave Chattanooga once the war was over, forever altering the ethnic demographics of the city. When Trowbridge visited Chattanooga following the war, he “found a strangely mixed population . . . traders, adventurers, soldiers, poor whites, refugees, and negroes.”<sup>70</sup> Many of these people stayed in Chattanooga, giving the city a bright and vibrant diversity such as it had never experienced prior to the Civil War.

Those in the path of the Union Army were faced by an organization with only one goal—winning the war. To that end, they sought to deal with the distraction of noncombatants in the most efficient way possible, mitigating the hassle, while staying as much out of civilian affairs as possible. They were more successful in some areas than others. The army’s attempts at the reestablishment of civilian government were admirable, even if they had ulterior motives. And while their record with religion and press, censoring those who spoke against the Union, may not be entirely justifiable, it is, at least, understandable. In the treatment of private citizens, however, the army crossed into dangerous territory. They took war-first strategy to a whole new level. It was no longer just supplies and raw materials that were fair game, but people were as well. Finally, the army held a mixed record with

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<sup>69</sup> Trowbridge, *The South*, 251.

<sup>70</sup> Correspondent, “News from the South,” *Richmond Sentinel*, reprinted in the *New York Times*, October 4, 1863; Trowbridge, *The South*, 250.

refugees and runaways. Although there were certainly human rights abuses committed by the Union Army, at the very least slaves were not sent back to their plantations.

It is important to note, however, that throughout the war the Union Army did follow the war-first policy. The reestablishment of civil government freed the army from civic responsibility. The censorship of the press and religion removed two of the major pro-South influences. Individual citizens were made to serve the Union cause, regardless of allegiance, and the refugees and runaways were only allowed to stay because they provided such a tremendous amount of assistance to the war effort. A war-first mentality permeated all of the Union Army's interactions with noncombatants.

### Conclusion

General Robert E. Lee said once that, "It is well that war is so terrible—we would grow too fond of it."<sup>71</sup> The armies of the North and South were not kind to the land they occupied. The effects of this mistreatment lasted long after the guns ceased to fire. In Chattanooga, the history of occupation can be felt in all of the forts and place names that remain, like Orchard Knob and Lookout Mountain, reminding us of an important strategic location. These hardships were borne by the people as well. On the McCallie farm, "Four years of civil war left the fine farm in a dilapidated

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<sup>71</sup> To General James Longstreet at Fredricksburg; Bergen Evans, ed., *Dictionary of Quotations* (New York, Avenel Books, 1978), 734.

condition; no fences, no crops, no horses, cattle gone, grain and food lacking, clothing worn, and nine hungry growing children."<sup>72</sup>

John Trowbridge, a Northerner who took it upon himself to see all of the great battlefields and cities of the South following the war, described just how powerful these effects are. I quote nearly the entire passage, as his words effectively allow us to begin to comprehend the aftermath of civil war.

The military operations, of which Chattanooga was so long the centre, have left their mark upon all the surrounding country. Travel which way you will, you are sure to follow in their track. There are fortifications at every commanding point. Every railroad bridge is defended by redoubts and block-houses; and many important bridges have been burned. The entire route to Atlanta is a scene of conflict and desolation; earthworks, like the foot-prints of a Titan on the march; rifle-pits extending for miles along the railroad track; hills all dug up into forts and entrenchments . . . farms swept clean of their fences and buildings; every-where, along the blackened war-path, solitary standing chimneys left, "like exclamation points," to emphasize the silent story of destruction.<sup>73</sup>

The area around Chattanooga and Nashville was forever changed by occupation. Although the Union Army's main goal was the end of the war and restoration of the nation, its officers were forced to confront the nonmilitary side of the South. Army policy was to do whatever it took to further the war effort. To that end, the army stole supplies from civilians and took what they needed from the South's farmland. They censored the press and the pulpit, and used individual citizens to accomplish military goals. And finally, they used the hordes of refugees and runaways to their ends by employing them as cooks, cleaners, and transporters.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> John T. Trowbridge, *The South: Its Battlefields, Its People and Prospects* (Hartford: L. Stebbins, 1866), 270.

War-first is a dangerous policy for basic human and civil rights, but it is one of the necessary evils of combat. An army bogged down by civilian affairs cannot possibly fight an effective war. The Union Army offered proof of this during the Civil War. By efficiently obtaining the resources the army required and effectively mitigating civilian entanglements, the Union Army's war-first policy helped end the Civil War.

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**Ryan Thurber**

**Into the Hands of Brothers: The Union Occupation of Chattanooga and Nashville**

**December 2009**

The civilian cost of war is always the most tragic aspect of a conflict, and Ryan Thurber's work brings this cost home in stark language. His title refers to the arbitrariness of the defined enemy in the U.S. Civil War and this is nowhere more clear than in East Tennessee, the Volunteer State which had strong Confederate ties. By comparing the experiences of Chattanooga and Nashville, Thurber illuminates the (inevitable?) ways in which the realities of military conflict strip the land, eliminate opportunities for compromise, and create new enemies.

While the military elements of the battles, for Chattanooga especially, have been well-covered, Thurber turns his interest to the less well-documented aspect of the Civil War in Tennessee, the occupation. After the boom and crash of the battles were over, how did the people of these cities interact with the so-called enemy? How did the occupation "look" on the ground? And how were these cities permanently transformed by these short years of hostility? Thurber argues that life was more difficult for the civilians than they (or he as an historian) would have imagined—liberties gone, resources commandeered, and indignities suffered. These were not the "brothers" that might have been expected to show some compassion or identification with those they were occupying.

Thurber is especially good at portraying the stark changes that would have occurred within Chattanooga—ecologically and demographically. More comparison between Chattanooga and Nashville with regard to the experiences of their black populations would have been useful. And it still seems unclear as to what the significance of this experience is—yes, civilian tragedies still happen, but is Thurber arguing that they are inevitable? That a civil conflict is different/worse/better than an international one? Are there any comparisons between Nashville and Chattanooga that might shed light on how different sorts of actions elicit different sorts of responses? And did anything about the occupations affect the long-term characteristics of the cities? Thurber hints in this direction, but more overt arguments would add to the usefulness and significance of this project.

Still, Thurber's highly original work is lively and engaging and this reader hopes it receives a wide audience.

Lisa Clark Diller  
Professor of History

Grade: 238/250 = 95% = A