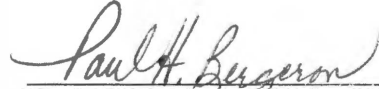
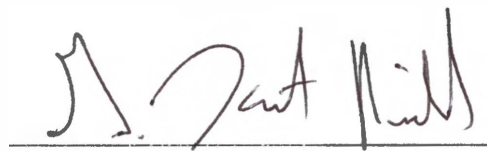


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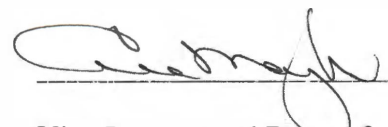

Paul H. Bergeron, Major Professor

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Graduate Studies

Thesis
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**“THAT SPIRIT OF CHIVALRY”:
TENNESSEE AND INDIANA VOLUNTEERS
IN THE MEXICAN WAR**

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Tyler V. Johnson
May 2003**

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Karen, for enduring the move to Tennessee and patiently listening to my frustrations as I wrote, my parents, who encouraged my love of history and who helped whenever asked, and my friends who helped me relax.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all those who have guided and assisted me along the way to my Master of Arts Degree in History. I would like to thank Dr. Paul Bergeron for his unselfish decision to stay past his retirement and guide me through the process of writing a Thesis. His insights into Jacksonian America have been invaluable, and I appreciate our meetings. I will miss having him as my advisor. I also want to thank Dr. W. Bruce Wheeler and Dr. G. Kurt Piehler for graciously agreeing to serve on my committee.

Lastly, I want to thank the graduate students at the University of Tennessee and my wife, Karen. You have all provided a fun and relaxing environment to work in, but you have also challenged me and helped me to improve as a scholar.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the motivations that inspired Tennessee and Indiana volunteers in the Mexican War of 1846-1848. Letters, diaries and journals, memoirs, and contemporary newspapers were examined to determine the reasons that drove men to volunteer and motivated them throughout their tours of duty in Mexico. Archives in Indianapolis, Indiana; Nashville, Tennessee; and Knoxville, Tennessee were searched to discover as many sources as possible in order to give a broad foundation to the conclusions.

Findings revealed two primary groups of motivations: personal and corporate (or collective). Personal reasons involved volunteers' respect for martial courage, their desire to exhibit it in battle, and a concern for personal reputation and honor. Corporate (or collective) reasons involved issues of state and national reputation. In regards to national reputation and honor, some volunteers signed up for the war out of a sense of patriotism (often expressed in partisan terms), while others expressed a yearning for vengeance.

A survey of the historiography surrounding the issue of motivation in the Mexican War is provided as well as recommendations for further research.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Late April 1846 found U.S. General Zachary Taylor camped along the lower Rio Grande just opposite Matamoros, Mexico. Tensions were high between Taylor's army and the Mexican forces across the river. The arrival of Major General Mariano Arista did little to cool the situation, since he promptly informed Taylor of the beginning of hostilities. Around three o'clock in the afternoon on April 24, Taylor received intelligence of Mexican crossings downriver from his position. A small body of dragoons found no evidence of the enemy, but another report in the evening prompted Taylor to dispatch Captain Seth B. Thornton with two squadrons to investigate. The next morning, twenty miles from camp, Thornton's men rode into a Mexican ambush. The Mexicans killed eleven and wounded six, and most of the remaining eighty men were captured, including Thornton and his second-in-command.¹

Once Taylor learned of the disaster, he hastened to inform Washington of this first battle. As the news spread from New Orleans (the chief port of supply for Taylor's army) and Washington to the rest of the United States, the nation rose in outrage. On May 9, the *New Orleans Tropic* printed a call to arms, subsequently copied by the *Louisville Journal* and the *Indiana State Journal*. The editor of the *Tropic* raged,

Fellow-Citizens!!—Here is another incitement to arm and proceed to chastise the perfidious Mexicans who ravage our territory, and thus take the lives of our brave men who have rallied on the frontier in their country's service. TO ARMS, then without delay!! Be prompt

¹ K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 47-8.

to avenge, and rally with ardor to do gallant service *for your country!!*²

By the time this article appeared in Indianapolis, action had already been taken in Washington.

Taylor's report gave President James K. Polk a reason to ask Congress for a declaration of war. As a result, Congress moved quickly to respond to the Mexican "aggression." The House of Representatives passed the war resolution on May 11, and the Senate followed on May 12. On May 13, Polk signed the bill, recognizing the existence of hostilities between the United States and Mexico.

Events had not waited for official declarations, though. U.S. and Mexican troops had clashed on May 8-9 in two separate battles near the Rio Grande called Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. General Zachary Taylor's small army, composed of U.S. regular army forces, drove off the Mexican forces without difficulty. Active war had begun, and Polk soon issued a proclamation calling on the states to provide volunteer companies to repulse the invading Mexicans.

Tens of thousands of men throughout the United States responded to the President's call for volunteers. Local politicians across the country poured forth patriotic orations on the necessity for enlistment. Many communities held torchlight parades and bonfires, and bands played martial music as the nation girded itself for war.³ While the South and the Old Northwest showed the most excitement, companies formed in the

² *Indiana State Journal*, May 20, 1846.

³ James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 18; Robert Ryal Miller, *Shamrock and Sword: The Saint Patrick's Battalion in the U.S.-Mexican War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 19.

Northeast as well. Volunteers went forth in the spirit of the citizen-soldier, recalling the militia and minutemen of the Revolution as they did so. Americans of the 1840s still perceived of the volunteer as the model of military necessity and necessarily viewed regular professional soldiers with suspicion. In all, over 100,000 men served in the U.S. forces during the Mexican War, 10,790 of whom died from disease and 1,548 died in combat.⁴

But first the armies had to be raised. Nine days after Congress's war vote, Democratic Governor James Whitcomb of Indiana issued his own statement, exhorting his fellow Hoosiers to volunteer and support the war effort. Whitcomb appealed to

the citizens of our beloved State, by their love of country and of its noble institutions, by their sense of the wanton and unprovoked invasion of our territory and the effusion of kindred blood by a foreign and perfidious foe, by their desire to emulate the deeds of noble daring, which have so proudly distinguished the older members of our confederacy, in our earlier history.⁵

In these remarks he captured many of the primary reasons offered in favor of volunteering. Whitcomb invoked Indianians' sense of state pride, their patriotism, their concern for an inheritance of national honor, and their desires to demonstrate courage and build personal reputations.

Eleven months later, and thousands of miles away in Mexico, General Winfield Scott's army of both regular and volunteer soldiers prepared to assault the Mexican forces entrenched upon steep hills at Cerro Gordo. As part of the attack, the 2nd

⁴ Miller, *Shamrock and Sword*, 21; Richard Bruce Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 66; Thomas R. Irey, "Soldiering, Suffering, and Dying in the Mexican War," *Journal of the West* 11 (1972): 285.

⁵ *Richmond Palladium*, June 2, 1846.

Tennessee Regiment of volunteers charged uphill against strong Mexican positions. Although the battle went well for the Americans, in the end the Tennesseans failed to take the enemy position, suffering immense casualties in the process. In a description of the action, the *New Orleans Picayune* praised the courage and gallantry of the Tennessee soldiers and their officers. The editors communicated the urgent desire of the regiment's men to let the American public know of the unit's proper execution of their duty. At this late date, almost a year after the war's onset, these Tennessee soldiers exhibited some of the same concerns voiced by Indiana's Governor Whitcomb. They demonstrated martial courage, saw to the establishment of their reputations, and professed their loyal service to their nation's cause.⁶

Both of these examples illustrated the reasons that drove American men to enlist in volunteer companies for service in Mexico. In my study I discuss and compare the motives of volunteers from the states of Tennessee and Indiana. In the process I raise several questions: Why did men volunteer for the Mexican War? Which incentives motivated them at the time of enlistment, and which reasons sustained their enthusiasm throughout their tours of duty? What societal values lay behind these reasons? Through a careful examination of newspaper accounts, soldiers' letters, journals, diaries, and memoirs, several primary motivations begin to appear.

These coalesce into two broad categories: personal and collective. Personal reasons involve three linked concepts: a respect for military courage, a desire to exhibit such courage and build one's own reputation, and the concurrent eagerness for battle in

⁶ "Address of the 2nd Regiment Tennessee Volunteers," *New Orleans Picayune* (date unknown) in *Jonesborough Whig*, June 23, 1847.

which to do so. Although soldiers lost some of their enthusiasm for combat as their time in Mexico wore on, they nevertheless maintained their concerns for personal reputation and martial valor. Collective reasons include the volunteers' devotion to the larger ideals of state and national pride. Recruits from both Indiana and Tennessee wanted to defend their state's honor and extend its military reputation. They also displayed an intense national loyalty, expressing their zeal to defend their country's injured honor and prove their patriotism.

Such enthusiasm took various forms. For Tennesseans, it frequently involved distinct calls for vengeance against the Mexicans who had committed atrocities during Texas's war for independence (in which numerous Tennesseans had fought) and also more basic appeals to national honor. Indianians failed to mention vengeance specifically, but they did want to restore the United States's honor, which the Mexicans had insulted by their "aggression" along the Rio Grande. In both states, expressions of patriotism often took on partisan tones. Whigs professed their devotion to the nation, while criticizing the Democratic Polk administration's role in instigating and conducting the war. Democrats defended their party's president zealously and attacked Whig critics as disloyal and accused them of providing aid and comfort to the enemy.

All of these concerns revolved around the concepts of honor and reputation. In general I follow the definition of honor as presented by Bertram Wyatt-Brown in his book, *Southern Honor*. The author claims that "honor is essentially the cluster of ethical rules, most readily found in societies of small communities, by which judgments of

behavior are ratified by community consensus.”⁷ Therefore, the issue of reputation is key to evaluating behavior. Wyatt-Brown goes on to cite four crucial components in the creation of “evaluations of conduct”: the importance of courage, especially courage exhibited against community and familial enemies, the opinions of peers as a key element of personal identity and self-esteem, “physical appearance and ferocity of will as signs of inner merit, and the defense of masculine integrity (including a strange mix of love and fear of women).”⁸ At one time or another, these elements find expression in the reasons cited by Tennessee and Indiana volunteers for their enlistment. Most worried about the status of their reputation among their peers, respected courage and wanted to demonstrate it against their nation’s enemies, zealously sought battle, and defended their honor (and their state’s and nation’s honor) whenever it was challenged.

As a southern state, and especially as a vigorous participant in the War of 1812, Tennessee appears to fit Wyatt-Brown’s cultural mold. The writings of the state’s soldiers certainly run along the same lines delineated in Wyatt-Brown’s study. Despite this agreement of sentiment, and even with the tremendous enthusiasm displayed by Tennesseans for enlistment (30,000 men answered the governor’s call for volunteers), many in the state remained uncertain about the justice of the war. Honor did not preclude personal opinions. Residents of Tennessee, especially those of Whig persuasions, questioned President Polk’s role in the war’s initiation and his prosecution of the military effort. Critics professed their uneasiness with a war waged, in their eyes, largely for the

⁷ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), xv.

⁸ *Ibid*, 34.

purposes of territorial expansion. They felt no qualms in attacking their fellow Tennessean in the White House. In fact, voters in Tennessee went so far as to elect Whig Neill Brown to the governor's chair in 1847 (over Democrat Aaron Brown) and deal Democrats a fairly sizable defeat in congressional and state elections. In the course of the campaign, things looked so poor for the Democrats that incumbent Democratic Governor Aaron Brown asked President Polk to promote well-known Whig William Bowen Campbell to a generalship to defuse Whig criticisms.⁹

Regardless of this squabbling and uncertainty, Tennesseans in general remained firmly behind the war effort. They had supported the annexation of Texas during the 1844-5 debates in Congress, and many Tennesseans remembered the prominent roles played by their fellow "Volunteers" in Texas's war with Mexico in the 1830s. Both Whigs and Democrats in Tennessee had scores to settle with Texas's neighbor to the south.

Considering the title of Wyatt-Brown's book, Indiana may seem like a curious choice for a discussion of motives that credits honor as the chief supporting value. However, a look at the political and demographic situation of the state shows it to be a good candidate for such a discussion. While the state developed strong ties to other Old Northwest states and with the Northeast, Indiana in the 1840s had a considerable historical connection to the South. Most of the early settlers of the Hoosier State originated from southern states, including Virginia and Kentucky. Since the earliest

⁹ Paul H. Bergeron, *Antebellum Politics in Tennessee* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 65, 73, 80.

settlement in Indiana occurred along the Ohio and Wabash rivers, the economic health of the region depended greatly on trade ties along the Mississippi River and with southern merchants in New Orleans. This led the state's politicians to develop close ties with the southern slave states in addition to their alliances with other northern states.¹⁰

Indiana also followed a pattern somewhat similar to Tennessee's political development. Although Indiana had become a Democratic stronghold during the early 1840s and Tennessee was more evenly balanced between the parties, both states contained active and viable Whig organizations. In both states the Democrats controlled the governor's chair at the outset of the war with Mexico, and in both cases the Democrats suffered electoral reverses in the mid-war elections of 1847. Indiana saw fierce debates over the causes and prosecution of the war, with even some Democrats raising questions about the Polk administration's war aims. However, Indianians of all political opinions, while not equaling the flood of volunteers in Tennessee, enlisted in sufficient numbers to form thirty companies of volunteers, three more than the state's number of counties.¹¹

Most important of all, for the purposes of this discussion, Indiana soldiers cited essentially the same reasons for volunteering and they remained motivated by the same incentives as Tennesseans while in the field in Mexico. Hoosiers used an almost identical language of honor and reputation to describe these motivational factors. Although my study does not allow for an in-depth exploration and comparison of social

¹⁰ Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana, 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1998), 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 278, 623, 630.

and cultural mores between Indiana and the South, the fact that Indianians used similar language suggests that the two regions shared some essential values.

In terms of historiography, the ideals of honor and reputation shared by Tennessee and Indiana find frequent expression in works on the Mexican War. Most books and articles on the conflict, whether general studies or more specific discussions of issues, mention the initial enthusiasm for volunteering in 1846. Several historians note the eager desire of enlistees to participate in combat, and quite a few include references to concerns about personal, state, and national honor and reputation.

James M. McCaffrey is among those who acknowledge the volunteers' eagerness for a fight. In *Army of Manifest Destiny* he describes the rush to enlist in the spring of 1846. The men "determined not to miss out on this, their generation's war. Just like soldiers before and since, they would strive for personal laurels, putting their manhood to the ultimate test."¹² In two separate articles on Kentucky volunteers in the Mexican War, Damon Eubank mentions the zeal for the battlefield present among that state's sons. Thomas R. Irey, in his article in the *Journal of the West*, comments that, "The American soldier, and especially the volunteer, had joined the service for the purpose of enjoying a picnic and a turkey-shoot south of the border." Other scholars agree.¹³

¹² McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 34.

¹³ Damon Eubank, "Kentuckians in Mexico: Kentucky Volunteers and Their Attitudes Towards the War, Mexico, and Mexicans," *The Kentucky Review* 14 (1998): 39; Eubank, "A Time for Heroes, A Time for Honor: Kentucky Soldiers in the Mexican War," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 72 (April 1998): 176; Irey, "Soldiering, Suffering, and Dying in the Mexican War," 295. Other examples can be found in: Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 51; Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 26; Joseph G. Dawson, *Doniphan's Epic March: The 1st Missouri Volunteers in the Mexican War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 2.

The themes of state and national honor appear in a similarly large number of works. Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr. demonstrates the importance of state reputation in his account of a speech given to South Carolina's volunteers. Lander notes, "The 'venerable and dignified' governor implored them to remember that South Carolina looked to them 'to sustain her honor in the field.'" Richard Timothy Herrmann also mentions state honor in his discussion of the Kentucky and Tennessee press during the Mexican War. He identifies the celebration of the honor and glory brought by patriotic volunteers to their native states as a major theme in wartime newspaper coverage. Citing Kentucky soldiers' desires to "maintain their state's military reputation," Damon Eubank concurs.¹⁴ Both Robert W. Johannsen in *To the Halls of the Montezumas* and John C. Pinheiro, in "Crusade and Conquest: Anti-Catholicism, Manifest Destiny, and the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-1848," illustrate the importance of national reputation to the volunteers as well. Johannsen remarks that the "aggressions" of a Mexican army against General Zachary Taylor's forces in Texas found ready rebuke because "An insult to the nation became a personal affront." Pinheiro lists the defense of national honor as prominent among reasons for enlistment.¹⁵ Finally, a few scholars even note the Tennesseans' desire to seek vengeance for the "massacres" perpetrated by Mexican troops against Texan revolutionaries. Both McCaffrey and Herrmann recognize the

¹⁴ Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr., *Reluctant Imperialists: Calhoun, the South Carolinians, and the Mexican War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 48-9; Richard Timothy Herrmann, "Martial Spirit and the Press: The Upper South and the Mexican War" (M.A. Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1993), 21; Eubank, "A Time for Heroes, A Time for Honor," 182.

¹⁵ Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 25; John Christopher Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest: Anti-Catholicism, Manifest Destiny, and the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-1848" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2001), 131.

existence of such sentiment, and McCaffrey cites it as one of the two primary reasons for enlistment nationwide.¹⁶

Despite such widespread attention to some of the initial causes behind volunteering, few historians investigate the staying power of such incentives. Among those scholars who do, most focus on the declining urge to fight among volunteers as the war wore on. In his article, "Zachary Taylor and the Indiana Volunteers," Herman J. Viola argues that the First Indiana Regiment, relegated to garrison duty for most of the war, suffered a severe sense of disillusionment. They saw only disease, boredom, and homesickness, not the glory and honor of battle. Thomas R. Irey describes a similar phenomenon among American volunteers at large who lost their enthusiasm as "the glamour of war wore off." As a result, few soldiers reenlisted when their tours of duty expired. Richard Bruce Winders claims in *Mr. Polk's Army* that quite a few army discipline problems resulted from disillusioned soldiers frustrated at their inability to prove themselves in combat.¹⁷

Outside of these accounts, only Viola, Herrmann, and Pinheiro pay much attention to the sustaining power of other motivations of volunteers. Viola and Herrmann mention the lingering influence of state pride, Viola in a discussion of the fallout

¹⁶ McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 31; Herrmann, "Martial Spirit and the Press," 12.

¹⁷ Herman J. Viola, "Zachary Taylor and the Indiana Volunteers," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 72 (1969): 337; Irey, "Soldiering, Suffering, and Dying in the Mexican War," 296; Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 86. Damon Eubank identifies a similar loss of combat eagerness among Kentucky troops, especially after the Kentuckians felt they had proven their honor at the Battle of Buena Vista in February 1847. See Eubank, "Kentuckians in Mexico," 38; Idem, "A Time for Heroes, A Time for Honor," 187.

resulting from the 2nd Indiana Regiment's retreat at the Battle of Buena Vista, and Herrmann in an approving description of the gallant conduct of Tennessee soldiers in the campaign against Mexico City (and the honor it reflected on Tennessee). Pinheiro describes the patriotism of most volunteers and their bipartisan support of the belief, "Our Country, Right or Wrong." He claims that both Whig and Democratic volunteers continued to support the war effort out of patriotism throughout the war.¹⁸

The lack of coverage of sustaining motives illustrates one of the several gaps in the historiographical coverage of motivation during the Mexican War. Historians may describe the eagerness of enlistees to see battle, the concerns with personal, state, and/or national reputation, but rarely do scholars attempt a complete description of all motivational factors. Also, most studies fail to acknowledge the intimate connection between honor and the incentives behind enlistment. Some mention volunteers' concerns with honor, but they do not describe what they mean by honor or the cultural importance of reputation, especially among volunteers from the South.

One of the few to attempt a comprehensive approach towards the motivations of Mexican War volunteers is Gregory S. Hospodor. Hospodor, who discusses the issues surrounding motivation in his article "'Bound by all the ties of honor': Southern Honor, the Mississippians, and the Mexican War," makes the connection between honor and reputation in enlistees. He argues, "Southern concepts of honor impelled the white men of the state to volunteer and the women of the state to support them." Mississippians

¹⁸ Viola, "Zachary Taylor and the Indiana Volunteers," 336; Herrmann, "Martial Spirit and the Press," 51; Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest," 132.

believed that an honorable man had to express his willingness to risk life and limb to preserve his reputation. Such an ethic also applied to the nation's reputation. Since Mississippians viewed Mexicans "neither as racial equals nor as honorable opponents," they had to chastise Mexico to protect the "collective manhood" of the United States from shame in the eyes of the rest of the world.¹⁹ Hospodor begins the task of presenting a more complete picture of motivation.

In the process of more fully describing enlistment and combat motivation in the Mexican War, scholars might look to Civil War historiography for several good examples. Several prominent Civil War historians have examined this topic in monograph-length studies, among them James M. McPherson, Reid Mitchell, and Gerald F. Linderman. Mitchell reminds us of the importance of motivation in two of his books, *Civil War Soldiers* and *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home*. In *Civil War Soldiers*, Mitchell warns against discounting the issue of motivation, asserting, "The soldiers of 1861, after all, were volunteers – independent and rational citizens freely choosing to defend American ideals."²⁰ In *The Vacant Chair*, he cautions against "treating the northern will to fight, in 1861 or in 1864, as foreordained."²¹ These statements underscore the necessity of investigating soldiers' reasons for volunteering, whether they were signing up to fight Rebels, Yankees, or Mexicans.

¹⁹ Gregory S. Hospodor, "'Bound by all the ties of honor': Southern Honor, the Mississippians, and the Mexican War," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 61 (Spring 1999): 2, 4, 7.

²⁰ Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1988), 18-19.

²¹ Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 153.

McPherson and Linderman provide a blueprint for undertaking this investigation.

Linderman identifies the important link between honor and courage in his book,

Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War.²²

McPherson goes a step further and uses the work of John A. Lynn, a historian of the French Revolution, to illumine the discussion of motivation. Lynn broke motivation into three categories: initial, sustaining, and combat. Initial factors drove men to enlist in the first place, sustaining reasons kept them in the army throughout the hardships of war, and combat motivations steeled soldiers against the danger, chaos, and confusion of battle.²³ This formula allows historians to evaluate the strength of incentives, since those factors that resonated most deeply with volunteers would obviously last the longest and through the most trial and suffering. McPherson uses this approach to demonstrate that the volunteers of 1861 on both sides of the Civil War meant what they said when they cited patriotism, honor, courage, and reputation as reasons for their enlistment, especially since the volunteers were still mentioning many of the same factors in 1864 and 1865.

It is McPherson's (and hence, Lynn's) formula that I attempt to apply in this study of Tennessee and Indiana volunteers. Although combat motives tended to blend with sustaining motives among these soldiers, the reasons for enlistment still need examining to see if they remained influential once the men reached the battlefield.²⁴ The study of

²² Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 11-12.

²³ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

²⁴ It is difficult to differentiate between sustaining and combat motivations for Mexican War soldiers since most saw little or no combat, spending the majority of their time on garrison duty. Even those who participated in battles might see only one or two major actions in the course of their entire year of service.

motivation explains why historical figures act as they did. To understand fully the Mexican War, we need not only understand why it started and how it progressed, but also why people participated in it. Why was it so important to risk life and limb? Why stay in the field through long spells of disease, danger, boredom, and fatigue? These are key questions to answer for any war, but especially for one fought so largely by volunteers. The Tennessee, as well as Indiana, men who flocked to the recruiting stations in 1846 and then to the battlefield, provided answers to such questions.

Chapter 2

“We will have a chance yet!” – The Tennesseans

One day in early June 1846, Nashville residents found themselves caught up in a whirlwind of excitement. As the rains and cool air of spring began to give way to the heat and humidity of summer, the sound of martial music filtered through hundreds of windows. Young men forgot their schooling and occupations and listened only to the drumbeats of war, flocking to the state capital to volunteer for the army. In the midst of this outburst of passion, young Cynthia Pope recorded her enthusiasm in a family letter, “I suppose that you are all as excited there about the war as we are here: every boat is anxiously looked for to hear the latest news. Volunteers are pouring in, and companies forming and parading about town from early in the morning until late at night. . . .”¹

A month before Miss Pope’s letter, one such company had not even waited for Democratic Governor Aaron Brown’s call for volunteers. The “Nashville Blues” offered their services for the war against Mexico in a May 11, 1846 letter to the Governor, informing him that,

In view of the distinguished patriotism which has always characterized Tennesseans, in every time of need, and of our long standing as a military Company, we confidently trust that should necessity require, we may be allowed the privilege of manifesting that spirit and zeal which would be worthy of the proud Commonwealth over which you preside.²

The “Blues” did not have to wait long to show their spirit. The very day they penned

¹ Cynthia Pope to Fielding Pope, June 2, 1846, Pope Family Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville (hereafter referred to as TSLA).

² “Nashville Blues” to Governor Aaron Brown, May 11, 1846, in *Knoxville Standard*, May 19, 1846.

their note to Governor Brown, notice reached Tennessee of Congress's call for 50,000 volunteers nationwide to serve against Mexico. The Volunteer State was asked to provide approximately 3,000 men. When Brown issued his proclamation, an estimated 30,000 volunteers responded, overwhelming the state government. Those men who received places in the state's forces formed into three regiments, two of infantry and one of cavalry. The 1st Infantry Regiment consisted of twelve companies of men from Middle Tennessee. The 2nd Regiment included eight companies altogether, some from East and some from West Tennessee. The 3rd Cavalry Regiment contained companies raised throughout the state. A year later, when Polk called on the states for more men to fill the ranks and finish the war, twenty-five companies of Tennessee volunteers stepped forward, enough to fill two new regiments.³

What prompted this massive reaction? What motivated these men, and what happened to that motivation when the soldiers finally reached Mexico, the nation they signed up to fight? Did their zeal vanish in the face of boredom, disease, fatiguing marches, and hot, desperate battles, or did they continue to express the same sentiments throughout their service that they expressed at their enlistment? The volunteers' letters, diaries, memoirs, and newspaper accounts of their service provide answers.

In essence, these sources reveal two primary categories of motivation: personal and corporate (or collective). Personal factors revolved around the concepts of honor and

³ *Jonesborough Whig*, May 27, 1846; Richard Bruce Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 71; Trevor A. Smith, "Pioneers, Patriots, and Politicians: The Tennessee Militia System, 1772-1857" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2003), 203-4; Richard Timothy Herrmann, "Martial Spirit and the Press: The Upper South and the Mexican War" (M.A. Thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1993), 68.

reputation. Volunteers demonstrated repeatedly a concern for their personal reputations as courageous men. Tennesseans respected martial bravery, yearned to demonstrate it in combat, and zealously protected the reputation earned for doing so. Collective concerns, while still involving concepts of honor and reputation, centered on those concepts as they related to the state and nation at large. When men signed up for duty in Mexico, they hoped to defend and expand their state's military reputation, which their forebears had established.

In addition, Tennesseans demonstrated a particular interest in their nation's honor. This issue took two forms. One manifestation involved expressions of patriotism and national loyalty, often colored by partisan political sentiments. In short, Whigs criticized the Polk administration's commencement and conduct of the war (while loyally volunteering), while Democrats attacked any protests of the war effort as disloyal and supportive of the enemy. Another form of national spirit included a desire for revenge in order to restore the honor of the United States. Whether this concern for revenge cited supposed Mexican atrocities against Texans in the earlier Texas war for independence or simply the sum total of Mexican "insults" towards the U.S., these Tennesseans wanted recompense for the nation's grievances. Concerns for vengeance, honor, and reputation repeatedly found expression in the writings of enlistees, even after the initial explosion of enthusiasm dissipated. Through battles, long stretches of boring garrison duty, and bouts with disease, the same factors appear again and again. In fact, with the exception of the hunger for battle, all of these reasons, both personal and corporate, continued to motivate Tennessee volunteers throughout their tours of duty south of the Rio Grande.

At the time of their enlistment, Tennesseans lived in a culture steeped in respect

for military valor. Two examples from the East Tennessee newspaper the *Jonesborough Whig* illustrate this sentiment. In late May 1846, the *Whig* published a review of Edward D. Mansfield's biography of General Winfield Scott (destined to lead the climactic campaign against Veracruz and Mexico City). The editors remarked that the biography provided a superb example for the nation's youth, emphasizing the General's bravery, chivalry, and patriotism and exhibited "a proud testimonial to the glory of our Country." Apparently, after noted Democratic politician Benedict Barnett raised a company of volunteers, he demonstrated a lack of fortitude or some of General Scott's courage once the state accepted the company into the army. In an editorial, the *Whig* roared,

Since his company has been accepted, he has ingloriously backed out, and like a *white-livered coward*, refuses to go to the army! . . . Since this disgraceful conduct, he has been hung in effigy, as we are told, in Blountville. This is wrong he ought to have been *hung in person* – the real dog, and not the *image*, ought to have pulled hemp without foot-hold.⁴

In the eyes of the newspaper's editors, Barnett had disgraced himself by shrinking from his duty to the state and the nation. As a result, they believed he had lost his reputation as an honorable man.

In the first high-spirited days of volunteering, many Tennesseans felt no trepidation at the thought of war. On the contrary, they enthusiastically joined up and awaited the chance to prove their manhood in combat. George Furber, who as of May 1846 practiced law in the Memphis office of Blackstone and Chitty, recorded his desire to "take up the sword and carbine, exchanging the office for the camp"; and immediately joined the state's cavalry regiment.⁵ Elsewhere in the state, John Blout Robertson heard

⁴ *Jonesborough Whig*, May 27, June 17, 1846.

the call of the drum and fife as well. In his memoirs he recalled his romantic fascination with war and his sense of “patriotic fervor.” Despite hearing tales of the sufferings and privations of war, Robertson commented, “I had a strange hankering to see a battle; I longed to test my powers of endurance in the trials incident to a campaign.”⁶

Even those who volunteered with some reservations felt compelled to do so by their sense of personal honor. They believed that an honorable man must step forward when called to serve his state and his country. To do otherwise invited shame and ridicule as a coward. William Caswell, who raised a company of dragoons in East Tennessee for the state’s cavalry regiment, wrote to his wife from camp on the banks of the Mississippi as his unit prepared to set out for Mexico. He confessed that he often chastised himself for leaving her alone at home, but “when I hear the ridicule which I have, upon the soldiers in time of peace who have become citizens in time of war, I am consoled for leaving home.”⁷ William B. Campbell, a state legislator from Carthage in Middle Tennessee, found himself elected colonel of the 1st Regiment of Tennessee volunteers. Campbell exhibited some of the same concerns as Caswell. When Campbell received his commission, his wife was quite ill. He professed uneasiness at leaving her,

⁵ George C. Furber, *The twelve months volunteer; or, Journal of a private, in the Tennessee regiment of cavalry, in the campaign, in Mexico, 1846-7* (Cincinnati: J. A. & U. P. James, 1848), 45.

⁶ John Blout Robertson, *Reminiscences of a Campaign in Mexico: By a Member of the Bloody-First: Preceded by a Short Sketch of the History and Condition of Mexico from her Revolution to the War with the United States* (Nashville: John York & Co., 1849), 60.

⁷ William R. Caswell to Eliza Gillespie Caswell, July 20, 1846, William R. and Eliza Gillespie Caswell Letters, Typed manuscript, McClung Historical Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville (hereafter referred to as Caswell Letters).

but believed “I could not get out of this business with honor.”⁸ Despite personal reasons which pulled their thoughts towards home, both Caswell and Campbell valued their reputations and their honor more.

In addition to these concerns for personal reputation, volunteers felt compelled by the larger issue of state pride. Tennesseans believed they had a personal duty to defend their state’s reputation as the home of brave and skillful warriors. With the beginning of the war with Mexico, the men of the Volunteer State saw a perfect opportunity not only to maintain that reputation, but also to extend it and win fresh laurels. As men across the state began to form companies, some even in advance of the call for volunteers, Tennessee newspapers swelled with pride at the martial spirit of their sons. In Memphis the *Tri-Weekly Appeal* boasted of the eager citizens in their midst who proved to the editors that the state “would be ready for any call.” The *Nashville Tri-Weekly Union* made a similar remark of the volunteer companies in that city, exulting that, “We are glad to see that the spirit which fired the bosoms of our fathers with patriotic zeal, burns with undiminished luster in the hearts of their undegenerate sons.”⁹

Quite a few of these “undegenerate sons” agreed with the sentiments of their state’s newspapers. John B. Robertson nodded approvingly at the response to Governor Brown’s call for volunteers, “This proclamation called forth all that spirit of chivalry for which Tennessee is so justly famed.”¹⁰ His comrade in arms, Robert Wynne, wrote to his

⁸ William Bowen Campbell to Governor David Campbell (of Virginia), June 4, 1846, in St. George L. Sioussat, ed., “Mexican War Letters of Col. William Bowen Campbell of Tennessee, Written to Governor David Campbell of Virginia, 1846-1847,” *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 1 (March 1915): 134.

⁹ *Memphis Tri-Weekly Appeal*, May 14, 1846; *Nashville Tri-Weekly Union*, May 16, 1846.

¹⁰ Robertson, *Reminiscences of a campaign in Mexico*, 59.

father from New Orleans in mid-June 1846 while on his way to Mexico. He informed the elder Wynne of the arrival of the rest of the Tennessee troops in the city. Orders called for them to embark for Mexico within the next few days and Robert claimed that all the volunteers felt eager to introduce the Mexicans to the spirit of “Old Tennessee.”¹¹

Along with expressions of devotion to the state, a strong commitment to the nation as a whole also existed. This sentiment found expression in defenses of national honor, as volunteers believed that Mexico had insulted that honor. Newspapers fired some of the first salvos. The *Knoxville Standard* cajoled its readers that despite the natural desire for peace, recompense had to be obtained for “all the injuries and insults received” in order to sustain “the honor of the nation.”¹² Many appeals came from those citizens who stayed home as they sent off their fathers, brothers, and sons to war. Frequently such remarks occurred on the occasion of the formation of volunteer companies. In Memphis, some of the women of the town presented a flag to the newly formed “Eagle Guards” in late May 1846. Upon receipt of the banner, Mr. Yerger explained to the women why the men had rushed to form an army unit. He asserted,

When first we heard that an invading foe had trampled upon our soil—when first we learned that the honor of our loved country was degradingly insulted—the fire of patriotism burned within our bosoms, and we proudly resolved that the insult should be washed out in the blood of a thousand foes, and our country’s injured honor be signally avenged.¹³

¹¹ Robert Wynne to A. R. Wynne, June 14, 1846, Wynne Family Papers (hereafter referred to as Wynne Papers), TSLA.

¹² *Knoxville Standard*, May 26, 1846.

¹³ *Memphis Tri-Weekly Appeal*, May 28, 1846. Another such ceremony took place in Jackson, Tennessee in early June, where Carolina Haskell called on the city’s volunteers to preserve the honor of the national flag and bring it back with “no stain of dishonor”, however tattered and grimy it became in battle, *West Tennessee Whig*, June 5, 1846, in “The Departure of the Avengers,” *Jackson Sun*, June 10, 1945, Roy W. Black Collection, TSLA.

Soldiers marched off to Mexico with many similar speeches ringing in their ears, and their agreement with the arguments of the people on the home front showed up in the volunteers' writings. Upon leaving home, Albert G. Cooper scribbled in his diary, "I left wife & children and all the comforts of home and started at the head of a company of gallant boys for Mexico in defense of my country."¹⁴ George Furber, who perhaps listened to the addresses of soldiers and townspeople as the "Eagle Guards" prepared to leave Memphis, cited the repeated "depredations" of Mexico and the patient complaints of the United States. He argued that Mexico's actions proved that that nation desired war.¹⁵

Furber's contention found ready acceptance among most of the Tennesseans heading off to war. Implicit in the statements of volunteers professing a desire to defend national honor existed a powerful sense of loyalty to the nation. In the rush to volunteer, men of both political parties expressed unified support for the country. However, some of the newspaper accounts in the first hot-blooded excitement of enlistment presaged the later partisan bickering over the nature of appropriate patriotism. When the Whig *National Intelligencer* (from Washington) criticized the Democratic Polk administration's role in starting the war, the *Nashville Tri-Weekly Union* fired back by accusing the *Intelligencer* of sympathizing with Mexico.¹⁶ Even though they generally supported the recruitment of volunteers, some Tennessee Whigs followed the *Intelligencer's* lead in

¹⁴ Albert G. Cooper, June 4, 1846, Albert G. Cooper Diary, Cooper Family Papers (hereafter referred to as Cooper Diary), TSLA.

¹⁵ Furber, *The twelve months volunteer*, 18, 24.

¹⁶ *Nashville Tri-Weekly Union*, May 21, 1846.

raising questions about the war. The *Jonesborough Whig* encouraged “all good citizens and patriots” to defend their common nation, but still mentioned concerns about the war’s justice or injustice.¹⁷ John B. Robertson denied the existence of party sentiment, sectional conflict, or “scruples of conscience” among volunteers, but the fact that he referred to such issues at all raises questions about the true lack of partisan beliefs at the time of enlistment.¹⁸

The Tennessee volunteers continued to express the same set of beliefs once they arrived in Mexico. Those who grew bored in camp or on garrison duty, grew tired on long marches, or faced the specter of disease longed to prove their courage in battle and emulate the deeds of those who had already faced the bullets of the enemy. While most seemed to lose their martial fervor once they saw combat, the Tennesseans remained impressed by bravery and concerned about their personal honor and reputation. Enlistees also maintained their loyalty to their state and their nation’s reputation. Soldiers wrote of their yearning to protect Tennessee’s military reputation and restore the nation’s honor by punishing the enemy. Some Whig soldiers displayed this patriotism despite their reservations about President Polk’s role in starting the war, while Democrats wholeheartedly backed the administration’s prosecution of the war and the resulting territorial gains.

As mentioned previously, Tennessee soldiers came from a culture that valued military valor, and the men exemplified this belief in their own writings. From the earliest days of the war, volunteers recognized and praised the courageous actions of U.S.

¹⁷ *Jonesborough Whig*, May 27, 1846.

soldiers and castigated those who were viewed as shirking their masculine duty in the nation's hour of need. This trend continued in the camps and on the march in Mexico. In late September 1846, for example, James Law MacLaughlin complained to his father of the many "*gentlemen*" who faked illness and homesickness to avoid duty, which naturally placed a greater burden on those who performed their duties responsibly.¹⁹ The malingerers clearly failed to fulfill their responsibilities and proved themselves, if not cowards, at least less than courageous.

From September 20-24, many Tennesseans participated in their first battle in Mexico when they stormed the city of Monterey with General Zachary Taylor's army. The two Tennessee regiments involved found themselves in some of the harshest action of the battle, as some companies participated in the house-to-house fighting on the last day of the conflict. Needless to say, this offered numerous opportunities for gallantry, and volunteers rushed to praise the bravery of their comrades. George Furber heard about the fight from afar and he reveled in the success of the volunteers. Furber claimed that the volunteer units (certainly including his fellow Tennesseans) fought like veteran soldiers and earned the respect of all the regular army officers.²⁰ Men who had fought at Monterey noted the deeds of friends at the battle in their letters and memoirs. John Blout Robertson lauded his unit's adjutant Adolphus Heiman who, "fearless as a consummate veteran, quite outdid himself, and far transcended the high opinion in which we had

¹⁸ Robertson, *Reminiscences of a campaign in Mexico*, 58.

¹⁹ James Law MacLaughlin to James MacLaughlin, September 1, 1846, MacLaughlin Family Papers, TSLA.

²⁰ Furber, *The twelve months volunteer*, 113-114.

already held his courage.”²¹ His fellow Tennessean George H. Nixon reassured the families of those who had lost their lives in that battle that their relatives “died in the Bossum [sic] of a glorious victory.”²² In a specific instance of the type Nixon mentioned, W. M. Blackmore informed Peter H. Martin of the death of Martin’s son. Blackmore described how the young Martin stayed to see to the needs of a wounded friend, sending other soldiers away for their own protection. Soon after he had urged the others to leave, Mexican lancers killed Martin in an assault on the position. Blackmore noted the young man’s gallantry and assured the elder Martin that his son willingly laid down his life to save his friend.²³

Tennesseans found few other examples of courage to honor for several months after Monterey, for the state’s soldiers participated in little combat until the Battle of Cerro Gordo on April 19-20, 1847.²⁴ At that clash the 2nd Tennessee Regiment suffered heavy casualties while charging up a steep hill towards fortified Mexican positions. A soldier in Captain William Caswell’s cavalry company described his awe at the bravery of the 2nd Regiment: “The gallantry and the desperation of this attempt, with the immense lose [sic] in killed and wounded the military history of our country will record

²¹ Robertson, *Reminiscences of a campaign in Mexico*, 164.

²² George H. Nixon to Stephanes Busby, September 29, 1846, Mexican War Collection, TSLA.

²³ W. M. Blackmore to Peter H. Martin, January 7, 1847, W. M. Blackmore Letter (hereafter referred to as Blackmore Letter), TSLA.

²⁴ All of the Tennessee regiments served in the siege of Veracruz on March 18-25, but with the exception of a brief skirmish to the west of the city, they saw next to no fighting, mostly witnessing the shelling of the city and its fort.

and fame display the names of those who fought and fell.”²⁵ In a letter of condolence echoing Blackmore’s words to Peter Martin, R. B. Alexander attempted to assuage Cyrus Hart’s grief over the death of his nephew at Cerro Gordo. Alexander assured Hart that the young man had died while cheering and urging his fellow soldiers to advance up the hill, in true soldierly fashion.²⁶

As these examples illustrated, Tennessee volunteers persisted in their respect for gallantry under fire throughout their tours of duty. Many of the men who responded to the second call for volunteers in late spring 1847 exemplified this respect despite the reports of hardship brought back by returning veterans. For instance, C. M. Haile reported to Colonel William Trousdale the results of an expedition to the National Bridge in eastern Mexico in early November 1847. Haile described how the assignment cost him over half of his men as casualties, but he took pleasure in assuring the colonel of the soldiers’ bravery, especially since the men were raw recruits.²⁷ Haile’s men followed in the footsteps of earlier Tennesseans in Mexico, performing to the satisfaction of their officers and fellow soldiers.

In expressing admiration for courage, the enlistees revealed a deeper urge to exhibit bravery themselves. Combat represented the supreme opportunity to satisfy this

²⁵ Member of Capt. Caswell’s Company, April 18, 1847, Tennessee Cavalry, Second Regiment, Typed manuscript, “Journal Written by Member of Capt. Caswell’s Company,” Special Collections, University of Tennessee, Knoxville (hereafter referred to as TN 2nd Regt. Journal). The date may appear incongruous with the historical dates of the battle, but the information in his account of the fight corresponds with the known data regarding Cerro Gordo and the 2nd Tennessee Infantry Regiment. Perhaps the date was written in error.

²⁶ R. B. Alexander to Cyrus Hart, April 22, 1847, Lauderdale Family Papers (hereafter referred to as Lauderdale Papers), TSLA.

²⁷ C. M. Haile to Colonel William Trousdale, November 10, 1847, William Trousdale Papers, TSLA.

urge and establish one's personal reputation. As a result, the men communicated an intense longing to engage in battle and complained when they believed their superiors denied them chances to do so. This desire grew stronger as soldiers drew nearer to the enemy, and motivated the men in camp and on the march in Mexico.

From their first days south of the Rio Grande, Tennesseans wanted to test themselves under fire. William B. Campbell, commanding the 1st Tennessee Regiment, expressed his fear that the war might end before his regiment could gain a trial in battle. Since he had traveled so far to get to Mexico, Campbell wanted at least one chance to fight the Mexicans.²⁸ Wiley Pope Hale might have shared Campbell's fears. He promised a friend in a late summer letter in 1846 that Hale's company, the "Avengers," would be present at the site of any future fighting. Two months later he still itched for a chance to fight, telling his sister that he had come to Mexico for the specific purpose of participating in one sharp battle; and he felt optimistic about his chances of seeing one. If ever in combat, Hale promised to earn a place in the official military dispatches through his brave actions or die in the attempt.²⁹

Those volunteers who missed their chance at glory at Monterey still lusted for a fight in the months following that battle. The *Knoxville Standard* printed a letter from

²⁸ William B. Campbell to Gov. David C. Campbell, July 11, 1846, in Sioussat, ed., "Mexican War Letters," 137.

²⁹ Wiley Pope Hale to Burwell C. Keatts, July 27, 1846 (hereafter referred to as Hale Letters); Idem to Harriet A. Hale, October 3, 1846, Mexican War Collection, TSLA. Both Captain William Caswell and William King expressed hopes similar to Hale as the Battle of Monterey approached. Caswell wanted desperately to fight with his company, but he complained that he could not share in the glory earned by his comrades. King, sitting in a camp near Camargo on the Rio Grande (just like Caswell), grumbled at his unit's lost chance to see any combat. Caswell to Eliza G. Caswell, September 19, 1846, Caswell Letters; William King to Mrs. M. M. King, September 22, 1846, William King Papers, Special Collections, University of Tennessee, Knoxville (hereafter referred to as King Papers).

one Knoxville soldier who recounted the encouraging words of one of his commanders, Lt. Colonel Allison. Allison assured his unit that he recognized their eagerness for a trial in combat and promised them that “if there is any fighting to do—you *shall have it*.”³⁰ The mere rumor of enemy soldiers nearby energized the spirits of troops in camp or on the march. William McAdoo related one such occurrence in late December 1846. McAdoo’s unit had marched about ten miles for the day when unverified reports began to spread about Mexican soldiers encamped at the nearest water source, five miles away. The soldiers began to march quicker and pulsed with excitement at the prospect of action, but found the site devoid of the enemy, much to their disappointment.³¹

As McAdoo’s story demonstrated, the prospect of potential combat lifted the spirits of Tennessee troops, while the evaporation of such hopes brought those spirits crashing down again. Volunteer T. E. Dansbee described the situation at Monterey, when Captain Whitfield received orders to guard the camp while the rest of the Tennessee companies marched off to battle. Whitfield protested to Colonel William Campbell, begging him to allow the company captains to draw lots. Whitfield regarded it as an injustice if his company failed to receive a fair chance to see battle that day.³² In his memoirs, George Furber reported on two disappointing incidents, one on New Year’s

³⁰ “Baliwaxsta” to Colonel Crozier, October 16, 1846, in *Knoxville Standard*, November 24, 1846.

³¹ William McAdoo, “The Abridged Diaries of William McAdoo, Sr., Part IX: Mexican War Diary, 1846-1847,” December 27, 1846, Typed manuscript, Special Collections, University of Tennessee, Knoxville (hereafter referred to as McAdoo Diaries). Samuel Lauderdale provided another example of the attitude demonstrated by McAdoo’s comrades, remarking to his brother about the high spirits of his fellow soldiers and their anxiousness to see a “fandango,” or fight. Samuel Lauderdale to James Lauderdale, February 25, 1847, Lauderdale Papers.

³² T. E. Dansbee to E. H. Spencer, October 21, 1846, Tennessee Historical Society Collection, TSLA.

Eve in 1846, the other on the road to the Cerro Gordo battlefield in April 1847. In the first case, Furber's regiment, while on the march toward the city of Victoria, received news of the city's peaceful capitulation, dashing their hopes for a "brush with the enemy." Four months later, the men found themselves traveling to Cerro Gordo and marched rapidly in anticipation of the expected battle there. However, they were too late, missing the fight by a day, and only found work in some desultory skirmishes with local guerrillas.³³

Despite the opportunity for demonstrations of courage offered by "active service," the urge to fight failed to sustain volunteers throughout their service. Sometimes soldiers lost their zeal because of the dreariness of camp life, regaining it later on when the chance for battle presented itself. However, as the war dragged on, and especially after many Tennesseans experienced the combat they long craved, more and more enlistees lost their eagerness for the fray. They had already gained the honor they sought, and they wanted no more of bloodshed and suffering.

William King represented the disillusionment felt by those soldiers who served out much of their tours of duty in camps along the Rio Grande or in garrison duty. When he realized he had missed the chance to get into the fight at Monterey, King complained to his mother that "My ambition as a soldier will be at an end I think when this twelve months is out as I am almost certain that I shall never volunteer for a campaign like this."³⁴ His grumbling most likely grew out of frustration; and he seemed to believe that, if he had no chance of earning a reputation on the battlefield, there was no sense in

³³ Furber, *The twelve months volunteer*, 304, 578.

remaining in Mexico to rot in camp.

After Monterey, quite a few soldiers believed they had seen enough. William Campbell told his uncle a week after the battle that he longed for his wife and children and was “willing to quit off with the fame I have gained on the 21st before Monterey.”³⁵ Many men began to grow increasingly homesick after the fight and lost interest in talking of more combat. Both Benjamin F. Cheatham and William Tucker noted this phenomenon in their letters home. Tucker in particular remarked that to his comrades, once they had passed safely through their baptism of fire, there remained no more purpose in desiring more combat experience.³⁶ Captain William Caswell also reported on such sentiments among his men. Even though Caswell himself saw no action before the siege of Veracruz in March 1847, he reported in late January the desire of his men to go home. Later, at Veracruz, he again noted the homesickness of his men, who wanted to quit the service. He added his own anxiety to receive his discharge as soon as he could obtain it without disrespecting those units who had done more fighting than his.³⁷

In the latter months of the war, especially for those whose enlistments were drawing to a close, thoughts of home clearly overwhelmed thoughts of the battlefield. One of Captain Caswell’s soldiers echoed his commanding officer in a journal entry in early May 1847. The anonymous volunteer pined for his friends and loved ones,

³⁴ William King to Mrs. M. M. King, September 22, 1846, King Papers.

³⁵ William Campbell to Gov. David Campbell, September 28, 1846, in Sioussat, ed., “Mexican War Letters,” 145.

³⁶ Benjamin F. Cheatham to Louisa Cheatham, October 6, 1846, Benjamin F. Cheatham Papers (hereafter referred to as Cheatham Papers), TSLA; William Tucker to Harvey Tucker, October 13, 1846, Tucker-Vaughn Papers, TSLA.

dreaming of seeing them again, while he trudged through the final months of his tour of duty. He lamented that he and his fellow soldiers had reached the expected point of their discharge and they longed to set their feet towards home.³⁸ In another example later that year, L. W. Jordon confided to his wife of his lack of desire for more battles: "I have often thought I knew something about a battle, but I had no idea of it. I am perfectly satisfied with the scenes of bloodshed in these two battles."³⁹

Zeal for the battlefield tended to last only until soldiers either saw their first battle or else gave up hope of ever participating in one. After that point, the desperate fury of bullets and shells lost its lustre. The linking of a respect for military courage and a desire to demonstrate it in battle only worked to a point. However, there was a third facet to this equation. The importance of martial valor was inextricably linked to a concern with personal honor and reputation. Whether a volunteer had proven himself in battle or not, he expressed a consistent concern with his personal traits. His reputation depended upon honorable conduct on and off the battlefield, and the Tennessee soldier defended whatever personal standing he had with all of his strength. As a correlation, soldiers also provided support for comrades who found their reputations attacked.

William Caswell and William Campbell fretted over leaving their wives and families but felt compelled by honor to enlist. Tennesseans continued to follow such examples throughout the initial months of their tours of duty in Mexico. One week

³⁷ William Caswell to Eliza G. Caswell, January 27, March 29, 1847, Caswell Letters.

³⁸ Member of Capt. Caswell's Company, May 2, 1847, TN 2nd Regt. Journal.

³⁹ L. W. Jordon to Mrs. Jordon, August 25 (?), 1847, in William A. Provine, ed., "A Letter From Mexico," *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, 9 (January 1926), 279.

before the Battle of Monterey, Wiley Hale in a letter to his mother countered accusations of drunkenness leveled against him. He hoped she would ignore and dismiss such attacks, and pledged “upon my *honour* that [there] is not *one word* of truth in the report.”⁴⁰ Perhaps he worried over his reputation on the eve of a battle (since soldiers knew about Taylor’s movements towards Monterey), but at the least he wanted to preserve his honor against the accusation of alcoholism. Many more soldiers tried to cement their reputations in the weeks and months following the fall of Monterey. George Henry Nixon reported his actions during the battle to his friend Stephanes Busby. Nixon took care to assert that he led the charge on the Black Fort and became the first officer to wave his sword on this bastion of Monterey.⁴¹

As eager as Nixon was to secure the credit for ascending the walls of the fort first, William Caswell was just as concerned over possible attacks on his character. He had left his company of cavalry to accept an appointment on General Pillow’s staff shortly before Monterey. Since he had promised his soldiers’ Knoxville friends that he would take care of them, he feared reproach for abandoning his command.⁴² Caswell, Hale, and Nixon represented many of their comrades in their concern for their personal reputations. Some, like Nixon, wanted to secure the laurels from their actions on the battlefield. Others, like Caswell and Wiley Hale, acted to protect their existing

⁴⁰ Wiley Pope Hale to Harriet A. Hale, September 13, 1846, Hale Letters.

⁴¹ George Henry Nixon to Stephanes Busby, September 29, 1846, Mexican War Collection, TSLA. The Black Fort was situated on high ground outside Monterey, and the Mexicans had dug in at the building with a strong battery of artillery. Capture of this position proved essential in the efforts to secure the city’s surrender.

⁴² William Caswell to Eliza G. Caswell, October 2, 1846, Caswell Letters.

reputations from accusations of cowardice and moral incompetence. All of these volunteers wanted to earn the respect of their fellow soldiers and the families and friends at home, basking in praise for courageous deeds and comforting the families of those who died in the midst of gallant efforts against the enemy.⁴³

These attitudes continued to inspire Tennesseans as the war persisted into 1847. Tennessee soldiers missed out on the action at Buena Vista in northern Mexico in February, but they looked to the approaching campaign by General Winfield Scott against Veracruz and Mexico City for opportunities to earn honor. Samuel Lauderdale predicted to his brother in January, "If it shall be my fortune to fall at Vera Cruz remember that I will die like a soldier fighting for the injured rights of my country." Lauderdale was quite serious, promising in a later note that if his unit failed "to sustain our blood bought honors I am in hopes that none of our regiment will survive."⁴⁴ Few Tennesseans gave the ultimate sacrifice at Veracruz, but Samuel Lauderdale proved prescient when he died attacking Mexican positions at Cerro Gordo in April. Just before that battle, fellow Tennessean William McAdoo expressed sentiments complementary to those of Lauderdale. One night as McAdoo and his brother talked over the coming conflict, he professed his hope that both of them might survive the fight. McAdoo wanted future readers of his diary to know that if he fell in battle, he died "with no

⁴³ W. M. Blackmore and Samuel R. Anderson provided two additional examples. Blackmore comforted Peter H. Martin by assuring him of the honor gained by Martin's fallen son. Anderson thanked his wife and friends for their support and praise for the valiant actions of Tennessee troops at Monterey. W. M. Blackmore to Peter H. Martin, January 7, 1847, Blackmore Letter; Samuel R. Anderson to Mary Anderson, January 5, 1847, S. A. Weakley Papers, TSLA.

⁴⁴ Samuel Lauderdale to James Lauderdale, January 26, February 25, 1847, Lauderdale Papers.

cowardly fear of death” and only regretted the grief of relatives at his demise.⁴⁵

Soon after Cerro Gordo, those Tennessee soldiers who signed up in the spring of 1846 received their discharges from the army. George Furber, upon his release from service at Veracruz, described the activities of him and his friends in arms as they planned to return to civilian life. All of them felt pride upon remembering their noble service to their country over the last year, viewing the whole experience as a worthwhile and honorable venture.⁴⁶

Those who volunteered at the second call-up in 1847 seemed to agree. They also craved a chance to prove their bravery and earn a good military reputation. Allen M. Short, who wrote to his cousin Angaline in February 1848, provided a good example of this spirit. He assured her that he had lost any sense of cowardice and that he and his comrades came to Mexico to fight. Short explained that if he fell in any future battle he wanted to die “in the position of the brave fellow who fell *with* his face towards the enemy and let the news reach my friends in tennessee [*sic*] that I fell like a Soldier & died at my post.” On the same day that Short penned his letter, Benjamin F. Cheatham wrote to his father. Upon completing a year of service in Mexico in the spring of 1847, Cheatham had raised another company of volunteers and returned to Mexico for the remainder of the war. In his missive, he anticipated the end of hostilities but still hoped for a chance to win honor and glory if any more battles occurred.⁴⁷ Both Short and

⁴⁵ William McAdoo, April 17, 1847, McAdoo Diaries.

⁴⁶ Furber, *The twelve months volunteer*, 614.

⁴⁷ Allen M. Short to Angaline Neel, February 14, 1848, Mexican War Collection, TSLA; Benjamin F. Cheatham to his father, February 14, 1848, Cheatham Papers.

Cheatham illustrated the staying power of personal reputation as a motivational force. In their letters, diaries, and memoirs, other Tennesseans expressed the same thought in many different ways throughout the war, all concerned with honor and reputation even while they suffered in camp and in battle.

Besides their personal reasons of honor and reputation, the Tennessee volunteers continued in their devotion to state and nation while serving in Mexico. Soldiers took pride when their actions or those of their comrades reflected glory on their native state; and they defended Tennessee's honor when others challenged it. They likewise professed loyalty to their nation and its honor. The volunteers viewed their tours of duty as opportunities to reclaim national honor; and as a result, a craving for vengeance permeated their writings. Yet, in the process of demonstrating their patriotic sentiments, quite a few men revealed their particular partisan leanings. Thus declarations of patriotism frequently rang with Democratic attacks on Whig critics of the war and with Whig rebuttals to such charges.

Tennessee received universal support and devotion from its native sons engaged in the contest beyond the Rio Grande. When two Tennessee regiments attacked Monterey in September 1846 with General Taylor's army, those men within and without those units vaunted of the laurels won for the state in the battle. One volunteer boasted to the *Nashville Tri-Weekly Union*, "Every man feels as if the honor of Tennessee demanded his presence in Mexico . . ." and that upon the cessation of the war, "as Tennesseans we shall return reflecting honor on the 'Volunteer State,' and be rewarded with the welcome

plaudits of a chivalrous and intelligent people.”⁴⁸ In the weeks following the Monterey fight, those who had participated wrote home about the specifics of the conduct which “reflected honor” on Tennessee. An anonymous soldier assured his mother that the Mississippi and Tennessee regiments bore the brunt of the fighting. Moreover, he claimed that neither the Ohio and Kentucky troops or the regular U.S. Army units joined in the fray to any significant degree. As a result, “Genl. Taylor gives us all the credit.” In a note to his wife, Benjamin Cheatham joined in this sentiment, praising the gallantry of his Tennessee men in storming the “strong walls and batteries of Monterey” at the point of the bayonet. Ten days later he fired off another letter, this time to his sister, in which he showed his anger regarding a Mississippi regiment which claimed to have reached the Monterey forts before the Tennesseans. Obviously, he wanted no other state to share the glory he felt Tennessee deserved. Cheatham was not alone, as numerous other troops joined the chorus of praise for Tennessee, bragging of the “bright spot” added to the history of the state.⁴⁹

Even those who missed the engagement at Monterey still basked in the reflected glory of their fellow comrades. William Caswell, upon receiving news of the battle while he languished in camp at Camargo, lauded the gallantry of those from his state and enjoyed the “fresh laurels” added to American forces by the Tennesseans. Encamped at the same town as Caswell, Wiley Hale noted with pride the prominent role played by the

⁴⁸ E. Eastman to the editor, September 24, 1846, in *Nashville Tri-Weekly Union*, October 17, 1846.

⁴⁹ Anonymous to his mother, September 25, 1846, Mexican War Collection, TSLA; Benjamin Cheatham to Louisa Cheatham, October 6, 1846, Cheatham Papers; Idem to Medosa Riggs, October 16, 1846, Cheatham Papers; William Tucker to Harvey Tucker, October 13, 1846, Tucker-Vaughan Papers, TSLA; William Campbell to Allen A. Hall, September 25, 1846, in *Memphis Tri-Weekly Appeal*, October 29, 1846.

1st Tennessee Regiment and the unit's heavy casualties. Also, another of their comrades exulted that the actions of Tennessee troops at Monterey added "credit to themselves and honor to their state." His account, however, drifted into grumbling when he began complaining about the passive role so far assigned to Tennessee's cavalry regiment. After all, if one unit of "Volunteers" served so well and aided the American army in so great a manner, why did the army brass hold back another unit of Tennesseans?⁵⁰

This state pride sustained the volunteers of 1846 all the way through the winter and spring of 1847 up until the end of their twelve-month tours of duty. Much of this sentiment manifested itself in the course of the last two major engagements involving Tennessee troops, the siege of Veracruz and the Battle of Cerro Gordo. Wiley Hale finally received a chance to prove himself in a skirmish outside of Veracruz. He described how his unit drove away a Mexican unit protecting an approach to the city, planted the regimental and American flags in full view of the Mexicans within, and "*gave three cheers for Tennessee & Col. Haskell--!*"⁵¹ George Furber and William McAdoo participated in another sharp scrap near the city and both noted with pleasure the role played by General Robert Patterson. Apparently the General, caught up in the emotion of the battle, called out either "Tennessee forever" or "Hurrah for Tennessee!" and received loud cheers from the men in response.⁵² A month after Veracruz fell to General Winfield Scott's army, a cavalryman in Captain Caswell's company described the deliberations of

⁵⁰ William Caswell to Hugh Lawson McClung, September 27, 1846, Caswell Letters; Wiley Pope Hale to Harriet A. Hale, October 3, 1846, Hale Letters; "Baliwaxsta" to Col. Crozier, October 11, 1846, in *Knoxville Standard*, November 24, 1846.

⁵¹ Wiley Pope Hale to Harriet A. Hale, February 18, 1847, Hale Letters.

⁵² McAdoo, March 25, 1847, McAdoo Diaries; Furber, *The twelve months volunteer*, 543.

him and his fellow soldiers the night before the Battle of Cerro Gordo. The men discussed the strong and fortified position occupied by the Mexican forces and realized that many Tennesseans would die or be wounded the next day. However, all of the soldiers considered “the character of our State and country, of our individual character, and all resolved rather to die upon the field than discredit either.”⁵³

By the end of their service, most Tennesseans believed that they had not discredited their state’s honor. A year after the men first signed up, they still bragged about the accomplishments of their comrades and reveled in the glory won in Mexico. The volunteers went to war partly to preserve the historical military reputation of Tennessee and succeeded in that effort. John Blout Robertson explained it most accurately in his recollection of a sailor’s song on the transport ship returning Robertson’s unit home to the United States. As Robertson remembered, “He sung of the glory that Tennessee had gained under Jackson, and of the noble manner in which she had sustained her high reputation in the Mexican war.”⁵⁴

Attempting to sustain the high reputation of their nation also proved to be as relentless in motivating Tennesseans. Frequently men who volunteered cited the honor of their country as a whole. They believed that Mexico had sullied that honor by crossing the Rio Grande in April and May 1846 and attacking General Taylor’s army. Also, the sons of the Volunteer State bore a grudge against the Mexican army dating back to Texas’s war for independence in the 1830s. Tennesseans remembered the “massacres” of Texans at Goliad and the Alamo and resolved to wreak vengeance on the Mexicans,

⁵³ Member of Capt. Caswell’s Company, April 18, 1847, TN 2nd Regt. Journal.

especially since many Tennesseans had fought with the Texas forces. Finally, quite a few volunteers draped their search for national honor and vengeance in patriotic language which sometimes expressed itself in distinctly partisan terms. Whigs blamed Democrats for starting the war, and Democrats accused Whigs of aiding the enemy by criticizing the war effort.

In regard to national honor, several examples illustrate the depth of feeling among the Tennessee volunteers in Mexico. Robert Wynne scribbled a note to his father in late July 1846 to let the elder Wynne know how his sons fared as they camped on the Rio Grande “ever ready to do battle in its [their country’s] defense.”⁵⁵ The attitudes of Wynne and many other enlistees found expression in General Taylor’s proclamation issued earlier that summer to the citizens of Matamoros. It stipulated in part, “We come to obtain reparation for repeated wrongs and injuries; we come to obtain indemnity for the past, and security for the future.”⁵⁶ This sentiment lasted for many more months among the soldiers. In November 1846 a volunteer who served in the 2nd Tennessee Regiment, later to gain fame at Cerro Gordo, remarked on his unit’s orders to move out after two sedentary months following the Battle of Monterey. This unnamed infantryman claimed that “we are again called on to take the field in defence of our national honor. You may well imagine we are well supplied with the spirit of the wolf.”⁵⁷

The “spirit of the wolf” drove many Tennesseans to seek vengeance for Mexico’s

⁵⁴ Robertson, *Reminiscences of a campaign in Mexico*, 278.

⁵⁵ Robert Wynne to A. R. Wynne, July 30, 1846, Wynne Papers.

⁵⁶ *Nashville Whig*, August 1, 1846.

⁵⁷ Anonymous to editor, November 20, 1846, in *Knoxville Tribune*, January 6, 1847.

historical wrongs against Texas and the United States. In his memoirs George Furber recounted the Texans' battle against the Mexicans at Goliad, after which General Urrea oversaw the execution of dozens of Texas prisoners of war. Furber marveled that any Americans could excuse "this wholesale murder of his countrymen, this open violation of the most sacred capitulation. . . ." ⁵⁸ John Blout Robertson made a similar statement when discussing the enlistment of his company of volunteers. He asserted, "we had long entertained a grudge against the Mexicans. We had the old scores of the Alamo and Goliad to cancel; and, as Americans, honor required that we should aid to redress our country's wrongs." ⁵⁹ Later in 1846, as his unit marched to attack the city of Victoria, Mexico, Wiley Pope Hale demonstrated the same spirit as Furber and Robertson. General Urrea, the same officer who commanded the Mexican troops at Goliad in Texas, led the garrison at Victoria. Hale and his comrades felt "anxious to meet with the *gentleman*," and they vowed, if they caught him at Victoria, to "pay him up for old scores." ⁶⁰

National honor and vengeance served as powerful incentives to action. They functioned hand in hand with another manifestation of loyalty to country, patriotism. Some echoed an anonymous Monterey participant's simple devotion to his native land, who wrote of his unit's success in unfurling the first American flag on the walls of the city. Many others, however, colored their patriotism in partisan hues. For Whigs, this involved an uncomfortable dichotomy of questioning the war's causes while serving

⁵⁸ Furber, *The twelve months volunteer*, 155.

⁵⁹ Robertson, *Reminiscences of a campaign in Mexico*, 62.

⁶⁰ Wiley Pope Hale to Harriet A. Hale, December 28, 1846, Hale Letters.

faithfully in it. William B. Campbell wrestled with this issue, telling his uncle in a November 1846 letter that the volunteers had to continue the fight “until our enemy will agree to satiate the appetite of our President for new domains.”⁶¹ William McAdoo also described some of the Whig sentiment about the war among the troops in Mexico. He recounted in his diary an argument between Lt. Col. D. H. Cummings and a soldier named Reynolds over Whig criticisms of the war. When Cummings raved against those men who complained about the conflict’s causes while drawing seven dollars a month from the government, Reynolds responded that Whigs, who doubted “the justice every way of the war,” joined up out of national pride to spite the Democrats.⁶²

Democrats refused to tolerate or legitimize Whig doubts about the war, questioning the patriotism of all those who criticized the Polk administration. At times their reactions became almost visceral. Benjamin F. Cheatham condemned Whig critics in a May 1847 letter that seethed with anger,

I say D___ the man or set of men that would steel their hearts against such gallantry men who are fighting their Country’s battles and acquiting [sic] themselves so nobly, then to be discredyed [sic] by those [?] Cont[?] no soul men is more than I can bear.⁶³

Democratic soldiers seemed to retain their contempt for the administration’s political opponents until the end of the war. On February 18, 1848, after the Treaty of Guadalupe

⁶¹ William B. Campbell to Gov. David Campbell, November 9, 1846, in Sioussat, ed., “Mexican War Letters,” 149.

⁶² William McAdoo, November 16, 1846, McAdoo Diaries. Whigs continued to complain about Democratic charges of disloyalty throughout the war. In a response to such charges in the early spring of 1847, the *Memphis Daily Eagle* defended the soldiers “called on to fight Mr. Polk’s battles” and pointed to the many battlefields in Mexico “drenched in their blood and whitened with their bones.” *Memphis Daily Eagle*, April 7, 1847.

⁶³ Benjamin F. Cheatham to John A. Cheatham, May 3, 1847, Cheatham Papers.

Hidalgo had been signed, ending the war, volunteer James W. “Bolivar” Wynne penned a lengthy letter to his father. Wynne had followed in the footsteps and in the thoughts of his brother Robert by signing up for the war and citing his desire to protect the nation’s honor. In his letter, Wynne lashed out at Whig critics of the war, especially the famous Whig senator Henry Clay of Kentucky. He claimed that he could withhold his feelings no more and he stood prepared to “vent” in this note home. As Wynne put it, “I more especially am this prepared since I have read with indignation the anti-American & unpatriotic sentiments expressed by the *hero* of defeated Whiggery, ‘The Sage of Ashland’ & as I suppose, adhered to by the many yelpers who have long [?] like dutiful servants to his [?] skirts.”⁶⁴ To both Cheatham and Wynne, the Whig “yelpers” lost any sense of honor, because they failed to display the appropriate degree of loyalty to the national government in time of war.

These last two examples of political patriotism illustrate the passion behind Tennesseans’ claims regarding honor and reputation. These two concepts underlay both the personal and corporate categories of motivation that affected the Tennessee volunteers. Personal incentives arose from a concern with one’s own reputation as an honorable man. Collective factors involved loyalty to the state of Tennessee and the entire United States. Both the state’s reputation and the national reputation needed protection, and both the state and the nation needed courageous defenders to write new chapters of bravery.

To the volunteers, a man gained his reputation as a soldier through faithful

⁶⁴ James W. Wynne to A. R. Wynne, February 18, 1848, Wynne Papers.

discharge of his duties and through valorous conduct in battle. The volunteers came from a state that respected military courage and they demonstrated this respect in their writings and actions. Since they wanted to display bravery themselves, soldiers yearned for a chance to test their ardor in the face of Mexican lances and bullets. Whether or not they ever gained opportunities to prove themselves in battle, the enlistees worked hard to protect their personal reputations from the attacks of others. To let a charge of cowardice or drunkenness go unanswered was unthinkable. While their enthusiasm for a fight cooled over the course of the war, volunteers remained motivated by concerns for their reputations and respect for the bravery of their comrades.

The corporate motivations of state and national honor inspired soldiers from the first call for volunteers in the spring of 1846 to the last months of occupation in early 1848. Tennesseans rejoiced when their actions brought glory and fame to their state and fought against any attempts to discredit those actions. Whether they participated in the battles of Monterey, Veracruz, or Cerro Gordo or watched the war from camps on the Rio Grande, Tennessee men remained devoted to the Volunteer State's reputation. This loyalty extended to the country at large as well. Most Tennesseans enlisted in the army in the belief that Mexico had wronged the United States and they therefore wanted to correct that injustice and restore their nation's honor. Some discussions of national honor took on a tone of revenge, as Tennesseans sought to settle old scores with Mexico remaining from Texas's war for independence. Interconnected with the discussion of honor existed feelings of patriotism or fidelity to the United States. While a few men expressed an unfettered devotion to their country, many injected their expressions with their partisan beliefs. Whigs, while professing a spirit of bipartisanship at first and

proclaiming their fidelity to the nation, still criticized the Democratic Polk administration's role in starting and handling the war. Democrats viewed any such remarks as disloyal and disrespectful to the men fighting and dying in Mexico and missed few opportunities to attack Whig critics of the war.

Although they sometimes gave way to homesickness, especially as the end of their tours of duty drew near, volunteers still felt the fire of honor, reputation, and fidelity within themselves. In those extant reflections recorded at the time of discharge, the comments were overwhelmingly positive. The Tennessee soldiers believed honor had been served and the country's and the state's reputations restored. William McAdoo offered some comments on the occasion of his birthday on April 4, 1847. While he wrote them before his involvement at the battle at Cerro Gordo, they still offer a good illustration of his assessment of his war service,

Another birth-day! I am not the 'thing I was' at my last birthday. Though my future prospects are not by any means freed from 'thick clouds and darkness,' yet I have the consolation of feeling that I have used this year as well as I could under the circumstances. I am pleased that I 'came to the wars.' Could I foresee all I now know, and were allowed this year to travel over again, I should re-act my coming into the army.⁶⁵

McAdoo reviewed his year in the army with a feeling of contentment. He had served his country's and his state's honor, and his own reputation remained intact.

⁶⁵ William McAdoo, April 4, 1847, McAdoo Diaries.

Chapter 3

“To build a prouder monument of glory”: The Indianians

The smartly attired volunteers snapped to attention in Vevay’s public square, not far from the mighty Ohio River. As they stood expectantly, Mrs. J. L. Dumont strode forward to present them with the bright red, white, and blue flag sewn by the women of the town. Everyone strained to hear as she began to speak,

You will bear forth this banner – not to fling its stars and stripes over the gay scene of some national festival, but to plant it on the field of strife – to defend it, if need be, with your lives – those lives so precious to us all – and, at all events, to preserve it from every stain, save that of the dust and wear of time and conflict!¹

As Mrs. Dumont finished her call to duty, Captain Carter, the leader of the company, stepped out to answer. He promised the assembled women, “In the defence of our country and that flag, we will emulate the deeds of our ancestry; men who have built a prouder monument of glory.”²

Over one hundred miles away to the northwest in Bloomington, young Theophilus Parvin took a break from his studies at Indiana University in order to write a letter to Bessie Flowers. He lamented his lack of free time, claiming that it barely left him the opportunity to witness several companies of volunteers marching through the town on their way to serve in Mexico. Despite Parvin’s grumbling about the injustice of the war, he acknowledged, “The enthusiasm of the people, however, is up to a high pitch, and they

¹ *Indiana Palladium*, June 13, 1846.

² *Ibid*, June 27, 1846.

rally in the various counties under some petty demagogue, without distinction of party and without requiring the cause of strife.”³

Theophilus Parvin, regardless of his personal distaste for the war, described the type of environment that produced thousands of eager volunteers, such as those who appeared before the people of Vevay, Indiana. With the outbreak of hostilities with Mexico in early May 1846, President Polk called on the states for volunteers to help prosecute the war. His request reached Indiana on May 21. Democratic Governor James Whitcomb issued a statewide request for enlistees, and within a month, the twenty-seven counties of Indiana produced thirty companies of men. They assembled at Camp Clark, the designated staging area for Indiana soldiers on the Ohio River across from Louisville, Kentucky. These men proved sufficient in number to form three whole regiments, and sailed down the Ohio river that summer as the Indiana Brigade, ready to fight the Mexicans.⁴

What propelled so many Hoosiers to march off to war in a foreign country? What happened to these motivations once they reached the battlefield in Mexico? Did the men lose their ardor once confronted with the death and danger of war and disease, or did they maintain their devotion to their ideals? In a survey of the letters, diaries, and memoirs of Indiana volunteers, reasons for volunteering tended to coalesce into two general categories, personal and corporate. Personal factors centered around the volunteers’ reputations as honorable soldiers. These men valued military courage, wanted to exhibit

³ Theophilus Parvin to Bessie Flowers, June 17, 1846, Theophilus Parvin Letter, Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis (hereafter referred to as IHSL).

⁴ Herman J. Viola, “Zachary Taylor and the Indiana Volunteers,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 72 (1969), 336.

it on the battlefield, and fought continuously to maintain the reputation gained from such exploits. Corporate reasons involved desires to preserve the reputation and honor of the state of Indiana and also that of the United States as a whole. Volunteers expressed an eagerness to emulate the martial deeds of their forefathers and also to exact revenge from Mexico for repeated offenses against the U.S. These personal and corporate motivations saw expression both at the time of enlistment and in camp and also on the march in Mexico. Indiana soldiers continually made appeals to honor and reputation throughout their service in the war. The only exception was their zeal for combat, which noticeably dropped off after individual soldiers saw “active service” and witnessed their share of death and suffering.

When the call came for volunteers to fight in Mexico, Indiana residents not only rushed to sign up, but also related why they felt an urge to do so. J. P. Widney of DeKalb County wrote an emotional poem, titled “The Volunteer,” to express his feelings upon leaving for battle. He poured fourth,

Adieu, adieu, my native land,
 ‘To Arms! my country calls, ‘tis time
 To give to all the parting hand,
 And seek a far, far distant clime.
 Friends, kindred all, it gives me pain
 To part with those I hold so dear;
 But oh! can friendship have a stain
 When honor guides the Volunteer.⁵

Widney reflected a very common view in his poem. Indiana men frequently referred to the compulsions they felt regarding their honor and reputations. Males gained honor through courageous actions, gentlemanly conduct, and defense of their reputations. This

⁵ J. P. Widney, “The Volunteer,” in *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, June 27, 1846.

proved to be a powerful motivation, whether it involved personal reputation or the reputation of the state or nation.⁶

However, volunteers first had to get to the battlefield to prove their honor and win a courageous reputation. This they proved eager to do. Willis A. Gorman provided one such example, as he searched high and low for any chance to get in the action, even in advance of the departure of Indiana's regiments. He wrote to an influential friend, asking his pardon for boldly requesting any available appointment to Texas (the most recent scene of combat) that would "*half pay, and be respectable.*"⁷ A month later, as the volunteer regiments sat awaiting deployment in New Albany, Indiana, one anonymous enlistee wrote to the *Versailles Intelligencer* complaining of the inaction and of the political maneuvering for officers' posts. This soldier and his comrades expressed their fervent wish to fight for the nation and travel to the "seat of war" (a common term for the battlefield along the Rio Grande).⁸

As the men marched off to war, the newspapers of the state reflected the common concern with Indiana's military reputation. Just like the women of Vevay, various editors across Indiana charged the men with defending the state's honor and sent them off expecting the soldiers to fulfill that challenge. Both the *Indiana Palladium* of Vevay and the *Indiana State Sentinel* in Indianapolis relished the eager response of the state's

⁶ Benjamin Scribner provided another example of the influence of honor. He remarked in his memoirs of the war that he and his friends, members of a militia unit called the "Spencer Greys," joined the army to sustain their unit's reputation gained in previous military actions. Benjamin F. Scribner, *Camp life of a volunteer: A campaign in Mexico, or a glimpse at life in camp. / By "one who has seen the elephant"* (New Albany, IN: J. R. Nunemacker, 1847), 16.

⁷ Willis A. Gorman to John Davis, May 25, 1846, Willis A. Gorman Letter, IHSL.

⁸ Anonymous to editor of *Versailles Intelligencer*, in *Evansville Journal*, July 24, 1846.

citizens to the call for volunteers. The *Palladium* crowed over the gathering of recruits in the center of town, entrusting those men with the defense of Indiana's honor with full confidence. The *Sentinel's* editor, writing several weeks later, bragged that Indiana had produced the most volunteers of any state.⁹

When it came to national reputation and pride, the unanimity expressed in support of Indiana's reputation frayed along political seams. Most volunteers, with the exception of a few like Theophilus Parvin, refrained from distinctly partisan expressions at the time of their enlistment, while newspaper editors jumped into political debate in a very fervent way. Whigs professed grave misgivings about the war's necessity, especially since they had long opposed the expansionist sentiments of President Polk. The editor of the *Richmond Palladium* published one of his own letters describing the war as an unjust affair created by the Democratic administration and their "short-sighted policy."¹⁰ Despite such criticisms, Whig editors nevertheless supported volunteers and encouraged them with the same types of references to honor used by the soldiers themselves. The *Fort Wayne Times and People's Press* wished glory and safety to that city's enlistees, praising them for their prompt response to the government's call for volunteers to defend the nation. The *Richmond Palladium* and the *Evansville Journal* responded similarly, laying aside the question of guilt for the war's commencement in favor of a fervent desire

⁹ *Indiana Palladium*, May 30, 1846; *Indiana State Sentinel*, June 18, 1846.

¹⁰ *Richmond Palladium*, May 26, 1846. Strangely enough, considering the furious debate that would rage later that year over the Wilmot Proviso, Indiana Whig editors made little mention of slavery in their attacks on the Democrats. The state's volunteers did not reference the topic at all.

to prosecute the war to an honorable conclusion.¹¹

Democratic papers placed little confidence in such manifestations of patriotic sentiment. They treated almost any criticisms of the war's onset or prosecution as basically treasonous, and scorned Whig expressions of national loyalty as a mere charade intended to conceal their secret pro-Mexican sympathies. For example, the editor of the state's largest Democratic newspaper, the *Indiana State Sentinel*, responded to the Whig *State Journal*'s criticisms of Democratic Governor James Whitcomb in this manner,

Now we think that any one, whether high or low, rich or poor, who will volunteer on such an occasion, is a *friend*, and a far better friend of his country, and of her officers and institutions, than an editor who stays at home, protesting against an 'aggressive' war against Mexico, and slandering those who are endeavoring to forward the service. . . .¹²

It appeared as if the verbal barrages in Indianapolis and across the state would challenge the artillery barrages in Mexico for ferocity.

While the first wave of volunteers in 1846 may not have colored its patriotic expressions with partisanship as thoroughly as the hometown newspapers, the recruits certainly demonstrated their loyalty to the United States and their intention to preserve the nation's honor and reputation. Hoosiers took their cue from Governor Whitcomb's proclamation in late May, which called on the men of the state to turn out in support of the country and its institutions. Whitcomb cited Mexico's "invasion" of U. S. territory after numerous efforts on the part of the American government to seek an "honorable settlement" of all existing grievances. Such an insult demanded a response by all loyal

¹¹ *Fort Wayne Times and People's Press*, June 13, 1846; *Richmond Palladium*, May 19, 1846; and *Evansville Journal*, June 11, 1846.

¹² *Indiana State Sentinel*, June 4, 1846.

American men; Indianians responded to the call.¹³ Henry Edwards, a resident of the town of Columbus, described a local meeting convened in response to the President and the Governor's calls for volunteers. The assembled townspeople heard the two proclamations read, and then two prominent citizens poured forth with emotional addresses recounting the wrongs visited on the national government by the Mexicans. The speakers then appealed to the patriotism of local men, encouraging them to seek recompense for these wrongs.¹⁴ In subsequent gatherings across the state, especially at the raising of volunteer companies and in the statements of volunteers themselves, repeated cries to defend the national honor and protect the U. S. flag (as a symbol of that honor) found expression.¹⁵ This social and ideological clamor for vengeance and courage propelled the Indiana volunteers into the fray.

Before following these first volunteers to Mexico, it is important to remember that they represented but one of two waves of enlistment in the war. The Polk administration made a further requisition for volunteers in the late spring and early summer of 1847 to bring the war to a successful and definitive conclusion. These calls for more men created a fresh outburst of political sniping in Indiana, especially by Whigs, who questioned whether the war could ever come to an honorable end and whether the sufferings so far endured justified the conflict. Some editors even began openly to discourage enlistment,

¹³ *Indiana State Journal*, May 23, 1846.

¹⁴ Henry Edwards, May 30, 1846, Henry Edwards Diary (hereafter referred to as Edwards Diary), IHSL.

¹⁵ Numerous examples exist, including these from the *State Journal* in Indianapolis: A.Z. to the editor, May 25, 1846, *Indiana State Journal*, May 29, 1846; I.J., "A Farewell to Indiana," *ibid.*, June 17, June 24, July 1, 1846.

which naturally brought castigation from Democrats who pointed with pride to the new flood of volunteers, enough to form two new Indiana regiments.¹⁶

Notwithstanding this squabbling, these new Hoosier volunteers demonstrated the same devotion to their nation's honor and reputation as their compatriots of the previous year. Numerous examples existed. John H. Towner, a young man from Brookville, wrote in his journal of the return of the 3rd Indiana Regiment, one of the units formed in 1846. He watched them with awe, reflecting on the honors they had received and then he sprang to his feet, declaring his intention to emulate their deeds and gain honor for himself. Towner immediately slipped out of town against his family's wishes and traveled to the nearest community forming a company. Though he wavered for a second, wondering of the danger he might encounter, he thought of the ridicule of his peers if he backed out, and "determined to go at all hazards."¹⁷ Isaac Winans, a citizen of Gosport in Owen County, recalled in the book he wrote after the war that recruiting speeches in 1847 focused on national honor, and called on young men to come to the country's defense. He fondly remembered how these young men stepped forth boldly, "actuated by a love of country," and enlisted in volunteer companies. In another example, James S. Athon noted in his journal the departure of his regiment (the 5th Indiana) from Madison. He described the enthusiastic crowds who feted the men as they began their journey down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers towards Mexico to defend their nation's rights.¹⁸ Clearly

¹⁶ *Richmond Palladium*, April 28, 1847; *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, June 27, 1847.

¹⁷ John H. Towner, Chaps. I, II, August 1847, John H. Towner Journal, Hackleman-Towner Papers, IHSL.

¹⁸ Isaac N. Winans, *Sketches and Incidents of the Mexican War* (n.p., 1847), Indiana State Library – Indiana Division (hereafter referred to as ISL), 4-5; James S. Athon, October 31, 1847, James S. Athon

the patriotic fervor of 1846 had not diminished.

But did the fervor, whether for personal or corporate reasons, maintain itself in Mexico in the face of disease, boredom, and danger? The evidence shows that it did. In fact, volunteers demonstrated their concern for personal and corporate honor in even more detail and frequency than at their time of enlistment. Indianians respected military courage and desired to emulate it in order to build and maintain their own reputations. In addition, these men echoed the statements coming from home regarding the honor of their state, fighting to preserve it at all costs. Finally, the volunteers sought to express their patriotism by defending the honor of the United States. While some disputed the causes and responsibility for the war, they all proclaimed their loyalty to their country.

From their very first summer at war, Indiana volunteers showed a respect for military courage. In their letters, diaries, and memoirs, soldiers recounted the valorous deeds of their comrades with a sense of awe, often proclaiming their own wish to emulate such actions and sometimes lamenting the lack of such in themselves or their fellow soldiers. Hiram W. Catlin offered such a lament in his diary in August 1846, saying he was “very much vexed with men who wanted to go home & were more like babies than soldiers.”¹⁹ Dr. E. W. H. Beck had similar problems, complaining of his lack of success in creating a military and chivalric spirit among his men.²⁰ However, such examples, though useful as negative proofs, still functioned as a decided minority. The great

Journal, IHSL.

¹⁹ Hiram W. Catlin, August 11, 1846, Hiram W. Catlin Diary (hereafter referred to as Catlin Diary), ISL.

²⁰ Dr. E. W. H. Beck to Mrs. Frances M. Milroy, September 18, 1846, Letters of Dr. E. W. H. Beck, Mildred K. Richardson Papers (hereafter referred to as Beck Letters), ISL.

majority of Indiana soldiers seemed to have little problem motivating themselves with thoughts of martial glory. Samuel Milroy wrote a letter after the Battle of Monterey celebrating the achievements of the volunteers, who “have all the glory of that Battle. They fought like young *Devils*. I wish we had been in *it darn it*.”²¹

Even after their first taste of combat, Hoosiers still valued courageous deeds in battle, viewing them as the proof of honor. For example, Henry Edwards exulted in his diary over his unit’s chance to try its courage on the battlefield of Buena Vista. Also, Major A. F. Morrison told Governor Whitcomb back in Indiana that the state’s 3rd Regiment performed gallantly in the battle, participating in a brisk fight for several hours in support of a Mississippi regiment.²² When an Indiana rifle battalion retreated in the face of heavy enemy fire at Buena Vista, volunteer Benjamin Scribner took it upon himself to exonerate them of all taint of cowardice. In his memoirs, he argued that if people might find fault with the retreat, the unit’s “coolness and heroic defence” more than offset any shame from withdrawing. A. L. Robinson similarly defended the reputation of all volunteers at the battle, praising the victory as unique in the war and in the history of the North American continent. He claimed that it “placed the reputation of the volunteers above the reach of all slander and calumny.”²³

In addition to these numerous praises of living soldiers, volunteers lauded the

²¹ Samuel Milroy to James Milroy, October 8 (?), 1846, Milroy Family Letters, Mildred K. Richardson Papers (hereafter referred to as Milroy Letters), ISL.

²² Henry Edwards, February 23, 1847, Edwards Diary; Major A. F. Morrison to Governor Whitcomb, February 26, 1847, in *Richmond Palladium*, April 27, 1847.

²³ Scribner, *Camp life of a volunteer*, 64; A. L. Robinson to Dr. L. Dunlap, February 28, 1847, in *Indiana State Sentinel*, April 15, 1847.

feats of the heroic dead. Such casualties of honor gained everlasting fame by their ultimate devotion to cause and country, and Indianians thought it fit to honor them. One example of posthumous plaudits was the case of Captain Trustin B. Kinder. His fellow Indiana volunteer Isaac Smith referred to Kinder in a paragraph eulogizing several officers who fell in the line of duty at Buena Vista. Smith declared that, "Braver and more noble spirits than these never lived." In a letter penned several months after the battle, Smith again mentioned Kinder, asserting that he "was greatly esteemed by all who knew him."²⁴ The actions of G. Smith and T. V. Stran, who apparently died after saving their wounded comrades A. S. Goodwin and J. Brown at Buena Vista, stirred praise. A soldier named J. W. G. (full name unknown) scribbled a letter to the *New Albany Daily Bulletin* extolling the great deeds of Smith and Stran. His words provided perhaps the best evocation of the importance placed on bravery:

Men who would hazard their lives for the sake of their comrades justly deserve the esteem of all those who admire noble bearing and generous deeds, and their names should be indelibly impressed upon the memory of the relatives of the wounded who may with all correctness attribute their rescue to their generous benefactors.²⁵

Such men represented the epitome of military gallantry.

Indianians wanted this type of status for themselves. They believed that their service in Mexico needed the stamp of honor to be legitimate, and as a result, they worked to gain and preserve their own reputations as honorable men. Lewis Wallace,

²⁴ Isaac Smith, *Reminiscences of a campaign in Mexico: an account of the operations of the Indiana brigade on the line of the Rio Grande and Sierra Madre, and a vindication of the volunteers against the aspersions of officials and unofficials* (Indianapolis: Chapmans & Spann, 1848), 53; Isaac Smith to Austin H. Brown, April 10, 1847, Austin H. Brown Correspondence, ISL.

²⁵ J. W. G. to editors, date unknown, in *New Albany Daily Bulletin*, August 21, 1847, clipping in George W. Smith Papers, IHSL.

later to gain fame as a Civil War general and the author of *Ben Hur*, illustrated such sentiments in a letter home in October 1846. Another officer, Captain McDougall, had accused Wallace of pilfering money entrusted to his care, and Wallace angrily denied the charge. He fumed, “My name, my family, my education, and the endangerment of the little reputation I have thus staked my life to win, will prove such a charge a studied lie much sooner – at least as soon – as my own word solemnized by oath.” Later in the missive he insisted that he would return home with his honor intact, or not come home at all.²⁶

As Wallace’s letter indicated, Indiana soldiers rarely took kindly to attacks on their reputation or the reputations of their comrades and officers. Any aspersions cast against a soldier’s honor met vehement denials and countercharges from him and his friends and subordinates. For example, some in the army and the press began to question Colonel James H. Lane’s treatment of his men in the Indiana regiment he commanded. Possibly some of these attacks came from Whig editors and sympathizers, since Lane, along with the immense majority of Indiana officers, voted as a Democrat. In response to these accusations, a volunteer from Vevay fired off a letter to his hometown newspaper defending his commander. The soldier attacked the charges as mere partisan maneuvers made by the colonel’s political enemies. He blushed to think of men stooping to the depths of partisan bickering in such a situation.²⁷

Despite many examples like this, some charges of dishonesty, incapacity, and

²⁶ Lewis Wallace to William Wallace, October 29, 1846, Lewis Wallace Papers (hereafter referred to as Wallace Papers), IHSL.

²⁷ T. J. S. to unknown, date unknown, in *Indiana Palladium*, March 6, 1847.

cowardice found supportive audiences. A case in point occurred at the Battle of Buena Vista. The 2nd Indiana Regiment, placed in advance of the remainder of the U.S. forces, came under heavy attack by Mexican troops. In the thick of the fight, the unit's commander, Colonel Bowles (another of the Democrats in charge of an Indiana unit), ordered the regiment to form a line facing the wrong way and then to retreat. In his memoirs, Benjamin Scribner described the reaction to these orders, "At this display of incapacity in the hour of danger, great murmuring arose amongst the officers, and the men were all unwilling to trust their honor and lives in his hands."²⁸ Hoosiers defended the honor and reputations of their fellow soldiers and superiors, especially if attacks against their comrades' honor implicated the reputation of the whole unit or state. However, if volunteers believed that an officer or soldier had in fact behaved dishonorably, they frequently decided to attack the dishonored person in order to protect their own reputations from guilt by association.

Reputations and honor could not be fully obtained or defended without experiencing combat. As a result, Indiana volunteers frequently wrote of their eagerness to see battle and complained when they believed they missed opportunities to do so. From the moment they arrived in Mexico, these feelings became apparent. Isaac Smith asserted that "Nothing but active service will make volunteers contented with their situation." Harrison Dailey provided a perfect example of this when he told his father that his regiment, under orders to return to the Brazos River (back in Texas), grumbled very much at the order. When his unit had to retrace their steps to the mouth of the Rio

²⁸ Scribner, *Camp life of a volunteer*, 62.

Grande, Henry Graham faced a similar situation. He lamented that he had traveled 2,700 miles to see Mexico and fight in it, and now he and his comrades had to return and guard provisions. In addition, volunteer John Osborn told the *Wabash Express* in early August 1846 that he heard rumors of Taylor's bloodless capture of Monterey. He groaned that his friends back in Bowling-Green, Indiana probably had as much chance as he to have a fight.²⁹

While Monterey certainly involved much bloodshed, General Taylor did in fact capture the city on September 24th. Unfortunately for the Hoosiers, no Indiana units participated in the battle. In the aftermath of the fight, their desire for combat grew all the more. In early October, Samuel Milroy let his frustration boil over in a note to his family. He remarked, "We have been statione [*sic*] here at the mouth for near two months and no hopes for getting farther, or having to fight the infernal Mexicans."³⁰ Soldiers seized on any anticipation of active deployment and exulted over it. Benjamin Scribner told his wife that if the war continued, he and his unit expected to receive orders to march towards Tampico, where they hoped for a battle. Such a combat might bring them "a Glorious end, or a wreath of Laurels."³¹ In another case, Trustin B. Kinder related his expectation of a fight to his friend Livingston Dunlap, waiting for General Lane's (the commander of the Indiana Brigade) aide to return with orders for his unit to

²⁹ Smith, *Reminiscences of a campaign in Mexico*, 64; Harrison Dailey to David W. Dailey, August 12, 1846, David W. Dailey Papers (hereafter referred to as Dailey Papers), IHSL; Henry M. Graham, August 19, 1846, Henry M. Graham Diaries (hereafter referred to as Graham Diaries), IHSL; John Osborn to editor, August 7, 1846, *Wabash Express*, in *Richmond Palladium*, October 6, 1846.

³⁰ Samuel Milroy to James Milroy, October 8 (?), 1846, Milroy Letters.

³¹ Benjamin F. Scribner to Charlotte Scribner, October 27, 1846, Benjamin F. Scribner Papers, IHSL.

advance.³² Several days after Kinder's letter, James Athon remarked on the frustrating ambiguity of rumors. He lamented that their hopes rose upon one set of rumors, but the next day reports arrived saying just the opposite. While he recognized the important role played by his 3rd regiment even on garrison duty, he still noted the impatience of the volunteers to gain an honorable place in history through active service in battle.³³

When orders came to advance towards an expected brush with the enemy, Indianians celebrated. As the battle at Buena Vista approached (it took many weeks to get all of the necessary troops on the road and on to Saltillo to attack the nearby Mexican army), soldiers rejoiced at the opportunity. Trustin B. Kinder relaxed upon word of his regiment's orders to march for Saltillo, telling his friend Dunlap that he and his friends felt confident of seeing combat and had ceased their grumbling at being held back.³⁴ Benjamin Scribner proclaimed his relief when the 1st Indiana Regiment received the orders to return to Matamoros instead of Scribner's unit. All the same, he felt sympathy for the men of the 1st Regiment, describing the tears in their eyes as proof of their disappointment.³⁵

The battle finally came for these men, and they met it with determination and confidence. Shortly after the battle, one soldier from southern Indiana reflected on his feelings just before the fight commenced. He reminisced, "Our troops being then partly

³² Trustin B. Kinder to Livingston Dunlap, November 28, 1846, Trustin B. Kinder Papers (hereafter referred to as Kinder Papers), IHSL.

³³ James S. Athon to David W. Dailey, December 1, 1846, Dailey Papers.

³⁴ Trustin B. Kinder to Livingston Dunlap, December 15, 1846, Kinder Papers. Kinder certainly saw action, especially considering the fact that he died at Buena Vista.

³⁵ Scribner, *Camp life of a volunteer*, 50.

surrounded, and well aware of our inferiority in numbers, our bosoms beat, as we advanced to the field, partly on account of our critical situation, but more particularly with ardor for winning glory.”³⁶ That same week, Captain Thomas W. Gibson was filled with excitement and adrenaline after his company’s performance at Buena Vista. Gibson told his wife of his belief that the army around General Taylor could “whip fifty thousand of the best Mexican troops that ever were on a field of battle.”³⁷

Not all were so fortunate in their ability to prove their honor in the face of the enemy. The men of the 1st Regiment had to sit out the fight at Buena Vista and chafe under the restraints of garrison duty along the Rio Grande. Quite a few complained about their situation. One volunteer described his turn as brigade officer of the day, staying up all night and day listening for warnings about the enemy from his camp’s sentries and pickets. He assured his friend back home that while it kept him very busy for that day, his unit had become accustomed to such duties and pined for a fight at any cost.³⁸ Major A. F. Morrison also recounted the impatience of his men in camp. The soldiers under his command looked well, marched like regulars, drilled very well, but “are almost *spoiling* for the want of a fight.”³⁹ Many more soldiers waited in vain for orders to the front, hoping for a chance to prove themselves and gain a reputation. Wanting desperately to march into battle and whip the enemy, they exhibited no fear of combat. On the contrary,

³⁶ E. S. to unknown, March 1, 1847, in *Indiana Palladium*, May 1, 1847.

³⁷ Captain Thomas W. Gibson to Mary W. Gibson, March 4, 1847, in Donald F. Carmony, ed., “Mexican War Letters,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, 65 (1969): 135.

³⁸ W. A. G. to J. R. Jones, January 14, 1847, in *Western Sun*, March 6, 1847.

³⁹ Major A. F. Morrison to unknown, January 16, 1847, in *Indiana State Journal*, March 15, 1847.

they only feared that the Mexicans might not oblige by attacking the Americans.⁴⁰ Some men, especially those serving in the 1st Indiana Regiment, waited in vain for their entire tour of duty for a chance to test their courage. William Pearsons sighed in a letter to Frances Milroy: "Our time is nearly expired and we shall soon be discharged to go home without sharing in the honours of our victory."⁴¹ Such frustrated men never gained the chance to fulfill one of their primary reasons for going to war.

The volunteers from the Hoosier state continued to place a high price on honor and reputation throughout the war. This concern still showed up in their writings as late as April and May 1847, when the first three regiments from Indiana were almost finished with their tours of duty. However, the accompanying zeal for battle frequently dissipated well before this time as men found themselves confronted with the realities of a campaign in a foreign country. Some of this fading sentiment resulted from simple homesickness, and some from the hardships of camp, but all expressing it proclaimed themselves tired of the whole affair.

Some lack of desire manifested itself as early as July 1846. Lewis Wallace warned his brother William against volunteering, mostly because he knew of William's love of domestic comforts, including food, sleep, and "the fair sex."⁴² Perhaps this advice came out of a full realization of the rigors of military life, perhaps out of a weakening martial spirit on Lewis Wallace's part; but it indicates how the yearning for

⁴⁰ Three examples are: Lieutenant C. C. Smith to editor, February 16, 1847, in *Indiana State Journal*, March 15, 1847; Lewis Wallace to William Wallace, March 4, 1847, Wallace Papers; E. W. H. Beck to Frances M. Milroy, March 7, 1847, Beck Letters.

⁴¹ William Pearsons to Frances M. Milroy, April 28, 1847, Milroy Letters.

⁴² Lewis Wallace to William Wallace, July 26, 1846, Wallace Papers.

battle often proved ephemeral. Only a month later another soldier reported on a less than enthusiastic spirit among his comrades. Henry Edwards noted in his diary the despondency in his unit caused by the harsh conditions in camp. He reported on the frequent rumors of the regiment's discharge and potential voyage home. None of these rumors proved true, which depressed the men still further.⁴³

Wallace and Edwards apparently represented a minority of opinion, since few other examples appeared until well into 1847. This makes sense, since most of the evidence portrayed the Indianians as eager for battle, especially because they had not seen one yet. Once that battle (Buena Vista) approached in February 1847, and especially after it passed, letters and diaries began to show a more intense longing for friends and family. This may have arisen from a sense of fulfillment, as the soldiers had proven their honor on the battlefield and had little motive to endure further sufferings once they had done so. Whatever the individual cause, after Buena Vista the Hoosier volunteers wanted to go home.

Benjamin Scribner exemplified this spirit of homesickness. On April 1, 1847 he described his thoughts and those of his friends in arms, "But still we look with much solicitude to the time when we shall meet our beloved friends at home."⁴⁴ Harrison Dailey expressed similar desires among him and his friends camped near the Buena Vista battlefield a month later. They even wanted to set out for home before their time of service expired, as the "monotony of the Camp" wore down their spirits. Unfortunately, Dailey saw no chance for such an early departure and resigned himself to waiting out his

⁴³ Henry Edwards, August 24, 1846, Edwards Diary.

⁴⁴ Scribner, *Camp life of a volunteer*, 71.

tour of duty in Mexico.⁴⁵ As the day of departure for Indianians approached, tired volunteers grew eager and restless. Hiram Catlin scribbled eagerly in his diary that he and his fellow soldiers were “All ready to start towards home and anxiously waiting for the 24th the day of our departure.”⁴⁶

Unlike the linked ideals of military courage and personal reputation, a yearning for battle failed to sustain a large number of Indiana troops, once they saw their first combat. Volunteers clearly desired a chance to prove their courage and make their reputations in battle; but once they demonstrated such proof, they lost their zest for the fight. Certainly homesickness and the monotony of garrison and camp duty played an important role in this loss, but most soldiers seemed to acknowledge these factors even while proclaiming their continued desire to demonstrate their bravery under fire. After two of the three Indiana regiments (the 2nd and 3rd) received their baptism of lead and smoke at Buena Vista, the volunteers still mentioned the rigors and suffering of camp, but they no longer seemed to want battle.

The personal reasons of honor and reputation proved to be powerful motivational factors to the soldiers on the battlefield. Volunteers also espoused two primary corporate reasons for volunteering: state and national honor and reputation. Hoosier soldiers repeatedly insisted on defending Indiana and its reputation. By reputation they meant the state’s capability to produce honorable and brave volunteers. Any attack on the courage and conduct of the volunteers met vehement opposition as an attack on the state’s honor itself. The Mexican War provided a particularly intense example of this type of response

⁴⁵ Harrison Dailey to David W. Dailey, May 2, 1847, Dailey Papers.

after the Battle of Buena Vista in February 1847. When the 2nd Indiana Regiment retreated under fire during that fight, military superiors and newspapers charged the unit, and by implication the state, with cowardice. Indianians responded with a furious volley of counterclaims and defenses of their state's honor.

Meanwhile, Hoosier volunteers demonstrated an intense loyalty to their nation while in Mexico. This fidelity took several forms. Some instances found the volunteers simply proclaiming their desire to defend the honor of the country and its symbols, especially the national flag. Other examples illustrate a tendency to interpret such loyalty through the guise of partisan ideology. Whigs proclaimed their opposition to the Polk administration's initiation of hostilities and questioned the prosecution of the war. However, they maintained their fidelity to the nation and professed support for the troops in the field, hoping for a quick and efficient victory. Democrats, on the other hand, declared that blaming the administration for the war, in addition to questioning its prosecution, served only to strengthen the enemy. In essence, they accused Whigs of disloyalty to the United States. To them, faithfulness to the country involved wholehearted support of the war effort.

Such backing certainly characterized Indiana volunteers' views toward their state, especially those attitudes that sustained them while in the field, whether in combat or in camp. The longing to promote their state became evident from their first months south of the Rio Grande. In the early pages of his memoirs, Isaac Smith boasted of the actions of Indiana's volunteers, saying,

⁴⁶ Hiram W. Catlin, May 23, 1847, Catlin Diary.

When we saw how ready Indiana was to defend the flag of her country, when thousands enrolled their names to go wherever the star-spangled banner waved aloft, or where our enemies stood in defiance, we felt proud that we were Indianians, and that our State was vindicated in a manner that proved her to be more just than her accusers.⁴⁷

Many joined Smith in their eagerness to advance the state's reputation. Back home, the *Evansville Journal* greeted the news of the American victory at Monterey in September 1846 with a mixture of joy and regret, due to the absence of the Indiana regiments from the battle. The newspaper expressed confidence that if the state's native sons had participated in the fight, they would have acquitted themselves nobly.⁴⁸

In the ensuing months, Hoosier soldiers chomped at the bit, hoping to enhance their state's reputation. Benjamin Scribner wrote of his unit's desire to see battle near Tampico in late October, either meeting their demise in gallant fashion or earning fame for their performance. Apparently the men received assurances from General Patterson that their lack of combat service reflected no disrespect on the part of their superiors and failed to damage their reputation.⁴⁹ In another example, Trustin B. Kinder illustrated his loyalty to Indiana when he assured his friend Livingston Dunlap that if he fell in battle he would "only receive what a soldier volunteers for." Kinder reminded Dunlap that if he died he died in defense of his nation's rights and hoped that through his death, "I have not disgraced my own native Hoosier state."⁵⁰ As noted earlier in the discussion on military courage, Kinder proved prescient, for he perished at Buena Vista. As Taylor's army

⁴⁷ Smith, *Reminiscences of a campaign in Mexico*, 5.

⁴⁸ *Evansville Journal*, October 15, 1846.

⁴⁹ Scribner, *Camp life of a volunteer*, 35.

⁵⁰ Trustin B. Kinder to Livingston Dunlap, December 28, 1846, Kinder Papers.

approached that battlefield in late January, Major A. F. Morrison wrote a letter in the spirit of Kinder and Scribner. He reassured the people on the home front that “You may rely on the courage and steady bravery of the Indiana boys, if they ever have a chance to show their blood.”⁵¹

Morrison and many others found quite a few opportunities to “show their blood” at Buena Vista on February 22nd and 23rd. In the immediate aftermath of the battle, numerous soldiers rejoiced in the valor of the Indiana regiments. On the 26th, Morrison penned a note to Governor Whitcomb, claiming that Buena Vista had “established for the young State of Indiana a reputation for patriotic devotion, chivalrous conduct and daring bravery which will endure until the conclusion of time.”⁵² Some, like Kinder, aided this reputation by giving the last full measure of devotion to their nation and state. C. C. Smith noted the loss of four courageous officers from Indiana in the battle. Smith said that while he lacked the knowledge of how many Indianians had fallen on the battlefield, he did know that “they fell gloriously.”⁵³ Even a month later, soldier George B. Tingley wrote to the editors of both of the state’s large partisan papers, the *State Journal* and the *State Sentinel*, that he felt compelled by a sense of duty to his state to encourage Hoosiers with the deeds of their sons in Mexico. Tingley told the editors, and through them the citizens of the state, that they should feel proud of the part their volunteers played at

⁵¹ Maj. A. F. Morrison to unknown, January 31, 1847, in *Indiana State Journal*, March 15, 1847.

⁵² Morrison to Governor Whitcomb, February 26, 1847, in *Richmond Palladium*, April 27, 1847.

⁵³ C. C. Smith to Mr. Defrees, March 12, 1847, in *Indiana State Journal*, April 13, 1847.

Buena Vista, where the men had fought gallantly.⁵⁴

Even those who missed the action near Saltillo drew comfort and motivation from the performance of the Indiana troops. Lewis Wallace, clearly reveling in his fellow Hoosiers' success, asked a friend to "Give us your best wishes though, and we will win names for ourselves and State, . . . the Hoosiers in Mexico have adopted a motto and a battle cry. Indiana forever!"⁵⁵ A. L. Robinson might have agreed with that shibboleth, as he wrote to a friend in March of his pride in the Indiana regiments. He claimed that the volunteers fought like veteran troops at Buena Vista and that the state had plenty of cause to be proud of them.⁵⁶ The brave actions of part of the Indiana contingent rippled out as an inspiration to all of its soldiers.

Regrettably, the legacy of Buena Vista provided just as much controversy as it did inspiration to the Hoosier troops. The disputes arose from the actions of the 2nd Indiana Regiment at the battle; and the response to it demonstrated the depth of fidelity that existed among Indiana's volunteers. On the second day of the battle, February 23rd, General Zachary Taylor had placed the 2nd Regiment in a ravine at a key point in the American defenses. Knowing that he had to take that position, Santa Anna, the Mexican general, sent four thousand of his troops to attack the four hundred American infantry and the small battery of artillery defending it. After a half hour of the unequal combat, Brigadier General Joseph Lane ordered the artillery to shift fifty or sixty yards to the

⁵⁴ George B. Tingley to editors of *Indiana State Journal* and *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 30, 1847, in *Indiana State Journal*, May 11, 1847.

⁵⁵ Lewis Wallace to (?) Chapman, March 12, 1847, in *Indiana State Sentinel*, April 15, 1847.

⁵⁶ A. L. Robinson to Messrs. (?) Chapman, March 22, 1847, in *ibid.*, May 13, 1847.

front and right. When Colonel William Bowles, the commander of the 2nd Regiment, noticed the movement, he interpreted the move as a withdrawal and ordered his unit to retreat. Only a few of his men could hear him over the noise of combat; and when the Mexicans pressed their advantage gained by the retreat, the orderly withdrawal became a rout. General Lane, with a few of his officers, rode up to stem the tide and succeeded in rallying some of the soldiers into line with Colonel Jefferson Davis's Mississippi regiment. The new battle line held, and Taylor went on to gain a smashing victory. After the fight, General Lane wrote his battle account without consulting his subordinates; and when General Taylor received the summary, he approved it largely without investigating the details.⁵⁷

Taylor's final report ignited a firestorm of controversy in Indiana and among its volunteers in Mexico. The state's residents showed disbelief when they heard of the 2nd Indiana's retreat. Mary W. Gibson wrote to her husband Thomas, a captain in the 3rd Indiana Regiment, telling him what she heard at home. She cited sources that called all of the Indiana troops cowards, alleging that they ran from the battle and lost many officers because they were shot in the back. Gibson complained, "we all hate that most prodgeously [*sic*] we all would rather you had stood like good soldiers since you have gone there."⁵⁸ Despite such expressions of dismay, most residents and newspapers in the state leapt to the soldiers' defense. The editor of the *Western Sun* encouraged all of his fellow Indianians to examine the accounts of the battle carefully, so as to discover the

⁵⁷ Viola, "Zachary Taylor and the Indiana Volunteers," 339-42.

⁵⁸ Mary W. Gibson to Thomas W. Gibson, April 5, 1847, in Carmony, ed., "Mexican War Letters," 139.

origin of the “calumny which was designed to heap disgrace upon the worthy heads of our soldiers and wound the pride of our patriotic State.”⁵⁹

In Mexico, quite a few soldiers agreed with the tone of the *Sun*. When he heard of a letter in a U.S. newspaper attacking the Indiana volunteers, Isaac Smith fired back, shouting,

If the caliber of the editor of that paper is such as to allow him to consider the lucubrations of anonymous scribblers as conclusive proof, he deserves the sympathy of the world for his weakness; but if he be an itinerant slanderer, who has only halted for a little season to mar the fair fame of our State and vilify the sons of the gallant pioneers, he deserves that contempt which will make him flee when no man pursueth.⁶⁰

Many of Smith’s fellow Hoosiers, while still spewing indignation, yet worried about the effect of the whole event on the state’s reputation. They varied in their comments, some taking comfort in General Taylor’s assurance that he still held the courage of Indiana troops in high regard, and some attempting to correct the situation by pointing to the half hour when the 2nd Indiana withstood repeated charges by thousands of Mexican soldiers as proof of the state’s gallantry.⁶¹

In the end, much of the blame for the withdrawal fell upon the shoulders of Colonel Bowles. Two volunteers (neither one gave his name) provided examples of this sentiment in their letters to hometown newspapers. One of them worried that the retreat at Buena Vista had “covered the Regiment and the State with disgrace” and argued that the only way to remove this stain of dishonor was to recognize that Bowles ordered his

⁵⁹ *Western Sun*, April 17, 1847.

⁶⁰ Smith, *Reminiscences of a campaign in Mexico*, 31.

⁶¹ Lewis Wallace to William Wallace, March 26, 1847, Wallace Papers; E. S. to unknown, March 1, 1847, in *Indiana Palladium*, May 1, 1847.

men to retreat. Similarly, the other soldier lamented the humiliation caused by the disgrace of Indiana's "proud name" because of one man's (Bowles') incompetent actions. This volunteer pronounced his fury "that our escutcheon should be the only one in the Union stained with the infamous charge of *Cowardice!*"⁶²

Indiana volunteers defended the reputation of their state passionately. They took frequent opportunities to revel in their fellow Hoosiers' successes and fret over their failures. The angry flood of letters and commentary surrounding the results of Buena Vista demonstrated the intensity of this sentiment, but many other examples of state pride existed even before the battle. Perhaps the best statement of this motivation came from an order issued by the headquarters of the 1st Indiana Regiment upon its discharge in New Orleans. The order commended the unit for its gallant endurance of the "fatigues and sufferings of the camp," and their vigilance when danger came near. The men had demonstrated their eagerness to rush to battle as well. The note wraps up with the statement, "In short, you have done all that soldiers could do for the honor and credit of the state and nation."⁶³

The "honor and credit" of their nation represented an additional incentive to Indiana troops while they served at the front in Mexico. The Hoosier volunteers believed in their responsibility to protect the reputation of their country. They sometimes referred to it as patriotism, sometimes as protecting their nation's rights, but all viewed it as essential loyalty. However, such fidelity found different definitions depending on the

⁶² "A Volunteer" to the *Evansville Journal*, March 13, 1847, in *Richmond Palladium*, May 5, 1847.

⁶³ Order, June 14, 1847, Headquarters 1st Indiana Volunteers, Robert H. Milroy Papers, IHSL.

opinions of the soldier. Partisan arguments over the war and charges of disloyalty against political opponents found their way into some soldiers' writings, especially those of Democratic volunteers.

The political fight between Whigs and Democrats reverberated into Mexico. Democrat soldiers resented the accusations of dishonesty and warmongering leveled at the administration and the Democratic Party by Whig critics. One volunteer from Salem, Indiana, furious at Whig attacks on the prosecution of the war, fired off a letter to his hometown newspaper. He insisted that these complaints almost induced him to return home and drive out the "*white* Mexicans," calling them unworthy of the name of "Americans."⁶⁴ Trustin B. Kinder also protested about Whigs on several occasions. In January 1847 he reported the receipt of the President's message in camp and proclaimed it popular with the troops. He expected the Whigs in Congress to vote against appropriations for the war but showed no concern over such resistance, saying the opposition party should try it if they dared. A couple weeks later he noted the very hostility to the war he had predicted and accused the "tories" of assisting the Mexicans.⁶⁵ Even after the second call-up of volunteers bickering still remained and Democrats still accused Whigs of disloyalty to the country. Volunteer Thomas Williams wrote to his family in November 1847, reassuring them of his satisfaction with his decision. He declared,

I am well plesed with my trip so well plesed with it if I was back I
wod in list again for I now it and honorable cause friends iwant you

⁶⁴ Anonymous Salem volunteer to editor of *Salem Republican*, Jan. 15, 1847, in *Indiana State Sentinel*, April 1, 1847.

⁶⁵ Trustin B. Kinder to Livingston Dunlap, January 25, February 8, 1847, Kinder Papers.

to think when you go to the ballot box *who is for ther Country and who is against there Country* for we are depenion you on you [*sic*] for hour assistance.⁶⁶

He clearly viewed the actions of Whigs as treasonous.

Some Indianians found a less partisan way to express their patriotism and national loyalty. They simply proclaimed their intention to protect the honor of their flag and country without any reference to party. Benjamin Scribner made just such a remark when he reflected upon the attitudes of his comrades and him at the Battle of Buena Vista. He claimed, "It seemed as if every man felt that he was an American soldier, and that he was individually responsible for the performance of that hour."⁶⁷ Back in Indiana, the *Fort Wayne Times and People's Press* agreed, reflecting the general sentiments of the state. After they received news of General Taylor's victory at Buena Vista, the editors proclaimed that the army had protected the honor of the U.S. flag and defended the glory of American soldiers.⁶⁸ Later that year, Thomas Williams illustrated the importance of national honor in a letter home, telling his parents and sister that if his friend "greanville" heard of another call to "come and defend his Country know [*sic*] is the time to defend it."⁶⁹

Indianians took their country's honor very seriously and many asserted their willingness to die defending it. They hoped that by their actions in Mexico they would

⁶⁶ Thomas Williams to his family (no names given), November 1847, ISL. Emphasis added; not in the original document.

⁶⁷ Scribner, *Camp life of a volunteer*, 65.

⁶⁸ *Fort Wayne Times and People's Press*, April 17, 1847.

⁶⁹ Thomas Williams to his parents and sister (no names given), Thomas Williams Letters, November 1847, ISL.

maintain the nation's reputation and not stain it with the guilt of cowardice. Their friends and family at home recognized and praised their devotion when the soldiers returned after their tour of duty. One example illustrated such a welcome perfectly. When the "Spencer Greys," a company of volunteers from New Albany, Indiana, arrived at their hometown after a year of service, their fellow citizens feted them energetically. A local printing shop designed a broadside to celebrate the soldiers' return, which exulted,

The promptness with which you responded to your Country's call, and the self-sacrificing devotion exhibited through twelve long months in a foreign clime, under circumstances of extreme hardship and danger, no less than your brilliant achievements on the bloody field of Buena Vista, have been truly gratifying to us all: it is, therefore, with the liveliest emotions that we now hail you as your Country's worthy representatives – the gallant defenders of her rights.⁷⁰

The men completed their duty and brought credit to their country by courageous action. Their motives had been fulfilled.

In the first excitement in the spring of 1846, Hoosier men rushed in great numbers to offer their services to their country in its war with Mexico. Several important reasons motivated them in their eagerness to join up. These motives largely maintained their persuasive power all the way through their service at the battlefield.

When volunteers reached home after a year's tour of duty, they still demonstrated a concern for their personal honor and reputation, based on a respect for military courage that regarded bravery in battle as the ultimate act of an honorable man. They also wanted to preserve the honor and reputation of their state, hoping to make their loved ones proud of their feats of valor. When the alleged retreat of the 2nd Indiana Regiment at Buena

⁷⁰ From "The Citizens of New Albany to 'The Spencer Greys,'" silk broadside (New Albany: Bosworth & Norman printers, 1847), IHSL.

Vista endangered the reputation of Indiana, volunteers and their families at home responded with an outpouring of indignation. They defended the actions of their fellow Hoosiers and charged any who accused the regiment of cowardice with dishonesty. Indianians proclaimed a fierce pride in their nation, declaring their loyalty and patriotism. Sometimes this pride took a distinctly partisan tone, especially for Democratic soldiers who accused those Whigs who had criticized the administration's initiation and prosecution of the war with aiding the enemy. Other times the men simply asserted their fidelity to the United States and their desire to protect its flag and its reputation from shame.

Volunteers from Indiana, like the men drawn up on Vevay's town square and like the eager recruits flooding into Theophilus Parvin's college town, went to war with Mexico for the sake of honor. They wanted to protect and establish reputations, whether their own, their state's, or their country's. In order to accomplish this, Hoosier men coveted any and all opportunities to see combat. While the volunteers eventually lost this fervor for guns and bullets, they maintained their concern for honor, defending the reputations they won on the battlefields and in the camps of Mexico. Despite the hardships, most believed their service a success. Like their Tennessee brethren, they remained willing volunteers.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

On July 20, 1846, only two-and-a-half months into the war, William Caswell sat down to write his wife a letter. Full of homesickness, Caswell groaned, "I feel more like deserting to see you and that little boy than for any other cause."¹ The war had not brought much excitement to Captain Caswell. Reduced to a spectator's role for much of the conflict, he watched as other units from his home state of Tennessee gained glory at Monterey in September 1846, and as Indianians, Mississippians, Kentuckians, and others earned renown at Buena Vista in February 1847. The life of the camp, not the march to battle, dictated his hours.

Despite this seemingly endless parade of tedium, hope entered when Caswell's regiment of cavalry received orders to prepare to participate in the attack on Veracruz. He wondered about the possibility of his demise in the coming battle, his first since leaving for war, but eagerness to prove his bravery soon replaced such doubts and fired his soul with thoughts of glory. In such a mood, he confessed to his wife on March 11, 1847, "I have thought, and longed so much to be with my family again, that all the wealth and honor and fame of the world could not keep me away from them, any longer than the dishonor and shame of leaving the standard of my country prevents my return."² The homesickness remained, but even at this date, after ten months at war, Caswell still felt honor tugging at his mind and his masculinity.

¹ William Caswell to Eliza Gillespie Caswell, July 20, 1846, William R. and Eliza Gillespie Caswell Letters, Typed manuscript, McClung Historical Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville.

² Caswell to Eliza G. Caswell, March 11, 1847, *ibid.*

Indianian Benjamin Scribner suffered through many of the same privations as Caswell. Scribner complained early in his memoirs that “The private performs the work, endures the privation, and when the toils and sufferings of the campaign are over, forgetfulness, folds him gracefully in her capacious mantle.”³ Clearly much of his war experience during his first months in Mexico failed to measure up to the expectations of an eager recruit. However, Scribner did end up participating in the Battle of Buena Vista, fighting with distinction. He remembered his feelings soon after the fight, “I now felt for the first time like exclaiming, ‘There is something glorious in the pomp and circumstance of war.’”⁴ War had not lost all of its attraction if it could elicit such a response.

The examples of Caswell and Scribner illustrate several of the key themes and concepts of this study. First, their experiences demonstrate the importance of investigating all relevant motives when examining what drove American men to volunteer. Caswell, from his initial enlistment to almost the end of his service, worried over his decision to volunteer and the effect it had on his wife and son. Nevertheless, he felt compelled by honor to remain in the field and serve his country. This leads to a second point, the importance of honor. Any assessment of American soldiery in Mexico needs to deal with the primacy of honor among many volunteers. Those from Tennessee and Indiana expressed great concern for honor and reputation. In fact, it underlay almost all of their reasons for enlisting.

Finally, Scribner and Caswell show the necessity of considering both initial and

³ Benjamin F. Scribner, *Camp life of a volunteer: A campaign in Mexico, or a glimpse of life at camp.* / By “one who has seen the elephant” (New Albany, IN: J. R. Nunemacker, 1847), 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

sustaining motives. James M. McPherson argues cogently in his book *For Cause and Comrades* that the motives of the Civil War volunteers of 1861 exhibited a remarkable degree of consistency and durability. In order to understand the staying power of Federal and Confederate armies in the face of unimaginable suffering and death, a reader needs to comprehend what inspired them to volunteer in the first place and what sustained them through the toils of war. Mexican War volunteers deserve the same degree of careful study. As mentioned in Chapter 1, over 12,000 United States soldiers died in Mexico, a casualty rate of almost twelve percent. What did these men believe they were dying for? What sustained them throughout the struggles of garrison duty, the fatigue of long marches on hot and dusty roads, and the stress and terror of battle in a foreign land? For Benjamin Scribner, his eagerness for battle lasted well into his tour of duty. For William Caswell, the impetus of honor and his personal reputation drove him on for almost the entire length of his service in Mexico.

Honor and reputation extended through the more collective incentives as well. Soldiers exulted in opportunities to defend the martial legacies of their states, adding new laurels to the stories of Hoosiers and Volunteers who had gone before them. The enlistees resented it whenever they believed someone had impugned the character of their state, and they acted quickly to refute any such challenges. This issue especially fired the minds of Indianians after the Battle of Buena Vista, when the retreat of the 2nd Indiana Regiment endangered the glory and reputation won by the state's other participants in the fight. Hoosiers fought for months to dispel the charges of cowardice and dereliction of duty leveled at their comrades and castigated those officers believed to be responsible for initiating these charges.

A similar strength of feeling informed volunteers' opinions of their country as well. Numerous instances can be found of Tennesseans and Indianians attributing their enlistment to a desire to defend the injured honor of their nation. They believed that Mexico, by crossing the Rio Grande and attacking Taylor's army in April-May 1846, and by repeated acts against U.S. citizens for decades, had insulted the honor of the United States. Tennesseans took a special interest in this, as many from that state remembered the "atrocities" committed by Mexican troops in the Texan war for independence and sought vengeance for these crimes. Even in the often bitterly partisan battles over the true nature of patriotism in time of war, both sides, Whigs and Democrats, looked to honor as the standard of behavior.

Motivations such as personal reputation, zeal for battle, a state's military heritage, national pride, and patriotism energized Tennesseans and Indianians in 1846 and 1847, moving them to volunteer for service in Mexico. These same motivations, with the exception of the zeal for battle, continued to provide fuel for the minds and hearts of volunteers from these two states throughout their tours of duty. More state studies, perhaps in the model of Gregory Hospodor's work on Mississippi soldiers, need to be done, especially for those states where the population largely opposed the war. Perhaps martial courage and reputation lacked power in regions where the populace deemed the war against Mexico dishonorable. Additional work will be required to answer this and similar questions.

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