REVIVAL IN THE CIVIL WAR

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by
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background to the Hostilities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revival in the Union Army</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Labor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revivals in 1863</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revivals in 1864</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revivals in 1865</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revival in the Confederate Army</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Labor</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Religious Literature</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revivals in 1861–1862</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revivals in 1863–1864</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Hospitals</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Prisons</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Civil War Revivals</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REVIVAL IN THE CIVIL WAR

In the days leading up to the Civil War (1861-1865), most Northerners, as their journals and personal correspondence suggest, were more concerned with temporal matters than they were with spiritual and moral issues. The abolitionists were focused on the evils of slavery and the justification of their position, while their opponents in the South were focused on their right to self-government. When Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1860 on an antislavery platform, the Southern states began separating from the federal government. The war started when hostilities broke out on April 12, 1861 in Charleston and did not end until April 26, 1865.

At first, both sides were focused on both personal and institutional preparation for the coming war. As the war began, both armies were plagued with vices common to soldiers such as gambling, drunkenness, prostitution, and swearing. A major shift in focus from the temporal to the spiritual would not occur among the armies of the Union and the Confederacy until after the beginning years of the war.

1Anne C. Rose, Victorian America and the Civil War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 59.

Background to the Hostilities

In 1835, the American Antislavery Society started a postal campaign which included the addresses of 20,000 Southerners along with a large-scale distribution of “antislavery pamphlets, kerchiefs, medals, and even blue wrappers around chocolate.” In response, many Southerners, according to Randy J. Sparks, began to sympathize with the proslavery opposition to the abolitionist movement and were encouraged by the clergy and the religious writers who started advocating a proslavery agenda through appeals to Scripture. Even though Sparks is correct to note the major shift in the proslavery movement in the South, the slavery topic had been addressed in many sermons and writings for many decades earlier. Michelle Snay notes, “[T]he scriptural justification of human bondage became a staple in secular proslavery writings.”

From 1837 to 1846, the Presbyterians, Baptists, and the Methodists all experienced schisms in their denominations due to strong differences of opinion regarding slavery. In April 1863, ninety-six ministers from all major Southern denominations signed “An Address to Christians Throughout the World” in response to the Emancipation Proclamation, wherein they affirmed their desire for peaceful separation from the North because of the North’s desire to force their antislavery agenda


4Randy J. Sparks, “Religion in the Pre-Civil War South,” in *A Companion to the American South*, ed. John B. Boles (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 170-71. The fervency of the Southern clergy’s proslavery stance reached new heights in the 1850s. The clergy and the religious press also advocated the responsibility of slave-owners for physical and spiritual needs of slaves. This led to a large-scale mission effort among the slaves.


upon the South. Within this address, the Southern clergy expressed their experience among the slaves:

Most of us have grown up from childhood among the slaves; all of us have preached to and taught them the word of life; have administered to them the ordinances of the Christian Church: sincerely live them as souls for whom Christ died; we go among them freely and know them in health and sickness, in labor and rest, from infancy to old age. We are familiar with their physical and moral condition, and alive to all their interests, and we testify in the sight of God, that the relation of master and slave among us, however we may deplore abuses in this, as in other relations of mankind, is not incompatible with our holy Christianity, and that the presence of the African in our land is an occasion of gratitude on their behalf, before God; seeing that thereby Divine Providence has brought them where missionaries of the Cross may freely proclaim to them the word of salvation, and the work is not interrupted by agitating fanaticism. The South has done more than any people on earth for the Christianization of the African race. The condition of the slaves here is not wretched, as Northern fictions would have men believe, but prosperous and happy, and would have been yet more so but for the mistaken zeal of abolitionists.

Revival in the Union Army

The Christian Labor

During the Civil War, revivals were frequent among the soldiers of both the Union and the Confederacy. For the Union Army, the chaplains and missionaries sent by the various denominations played a major role in the revival in the Northern armies. A third of the chaplains were sent by the Methodists, while the Baptists preferred to send missionaries due to their belief in the separation of Church and State.

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7 Robert L. Stanton, *The Church and the Rebellion: A Consideration of the Rebellion Against the Government of the United States; and the Agency of the Church, North and South, in Relation Thereto* (New York: Derby & Miller, 1864), 183.


The United States Christian Commission played a major role in the revival that impacted the Northern armies. Its mission was to gather and direct Christian volunteers from the Union states who would minister to soldiers and distribute Christian literature to them. Its delegates (approximately five thousand by the end of the war) delivered eight million religious books, “over [one million] hymn and psalm books, [eighteen million] religious newspapers, and [thirty-nine million] pages of tracts.” One of its most well-known delegates was Dwight L. Moody, who ministered to Union soldiers at Shiloh, Murfreesboro, Chattanooga, and Richmond.

Revivals in 1863

One of the earliest revivals among Union soldiers occurred in 1862 after their defeat at Bull Run while they were stationed at a camp near Washington. The chaplain, James Marks, held chapel meetings with hundreds in attendance until the campsite was abandoned. Marks states that many repented of their sins and professed faith in Christ.

Widespread revivals in the Union armies began to occur in the spring and summer of 1863 following their victories in the battles at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and

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14Ibid., 60.
Chattanooga. After the Battle of Chattanooga, the Union Army set up camp in Ringgold, Georgia. One of the soldiers stationed at this camp approached a chaplain seeking prayer for forgiveness, and as both knelt and prayed, several others joined them. After receiving God’s grace in the midst of this intercessory prayer,

The soldier went down to his tent-house, and carried the word of life to his comrades. They could not resist the claims of religion, when pressed upon them so earnestly and persistently by their fellow-soldier. He told of his trials with his profane tent-mates, and of the agreement that he has made, that, if they persisted in calling in their comrades for cards, he should have the tent every other night for a prayer-meeting. The result was, the prayer-meeting supplanted the cards altogether, and all in the tent and many men came with the new disciple to his Master.

During this revival, non-denominational services were held twice a day, baptism was done by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling according to the convert’s preference, and all partook of communion together. William Reynolds, a participant in the revival at Ringgold, writes about the non-denominational atmosphere present at that time:

As I was leaving Ringgold, some of the soldiers came to me and said that they had had a little discussion about my church connection. I asked the leader of the company what church he thought I belonged to.

“Well,” said he, “I think you are a Methodist.”

“Why, so?” I asked.

“Because you ask people to come to the ‘anxious bench.’”

I asked the other what he thought:

“I think you are a Baptist, because you are so intimate with Chaplain Nash. I’ve noticed you around with him a good deal.”

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16Ibid., 82.


The third I asked, answered—
“I think you are a Presbyterian, because you stand up when you pray.”
I happened to be a Presbyterian; but it was a curious and striking instance of how men put off their signs of division in the presence of the great work of the Lord.19

**Revivals in 1864**

Private Wilber Fisk, who served with the Army of the Potomac in March 1864, described nightly religious meetings that filled the tents to full capacity (about two hundred people) with still more who were willing to attend but unable since no more room was available.20 The large numbers expressing interest in the gospel led to many Bible studies which were taught by chaplains, Christian Commission delegates, and even soldiers.21 General McAlister, also a witness of the 1864 revival within the Army of the Potomac, observed in a letter to his wife that he had never witnessed “a better state of feeling in religious matters.”22

A great revival broke out in March 1864 at Bristow Station within the 11th Pennsylvania Reserve Regiment. It began with a lone private who prayed daily in solitude despite the scoffing of his fellow soldiers and was gradually joined by others.23 When a chapel was set up by the Christian Commission, it only took six weeks for the

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19Ibid., 279.

20Phillip S. Paludan, “Religion and the American Civil War,” in Religion and the American Civil War, ed. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles R. Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 24-25. Fisk also observed Bible studies “where tracts and papers on religious themes were freely circulated.”


22Shattuck, A Shield and Hiding Place, 80.

number of professed Christians to increase to 120.\textsuperscript{24} Phillip S. Paludan notes that the Army of the Potomac constructed “sixty-nine chapels in 1864.”\textsuperscript{25}

**Revivals in 1865**

The Revival at the Calvary Depot of the Army of the Potomac in 1865 began with arrival of J. K. McLean and George W. Bigelow and the building of a chapel.\textsuperscript{26} The camp was composed of 350 to 2,000 men at any one time including cavalrymen waiting for fresh mounts, injured soldiers, and large numbers of new recruits.\textsuperscript{27} These new recruits were, according to McLean, “about the worst class of men probably ever sent into the army,—professional ‘bounty jumpers,’ thieves—given their choice between entering the army or the penitentiary, and other refuse matter from large cities.”\textsuperscript{28} McLean recounted that as many as fifty or sixty would rise for prayer when the call was given during the chapel services.\textsuperscript{29}

While many revivals broke out among Grant’s troops whenever they were not engaged in conflict, even more impressive were the revivals that followed Sherman’s rapidly advancing army in the Carolinas. The number of Christians at the gatherings of one brigade in the XX corps grew from fifty to three hundred in attendance not including

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid.}, 203-04.

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Paludan, “Religion and the American Civil War,”} 24.

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Smith, Incidents of the United States Christian Commission}, 337.

\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, 337-38.

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}, 338.

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, 341.
several hundred others that participated.\textsuperscript{30} An attachment of black soldiers from Sherman’s army, who experienced the excitement of revival, marched into Charleston, South Carolina in April 1865 singing Christian songs.\textsuperscript{31} These accounts of revivals among Sherman’s troops were amazing given Sherman’s application of ‘total war’ tactics which included the destruction of churches as he marched through the South.\textsuperscript{32}

After the surrender of General Robert E. Lee in April 1865 and the remaining Confederate forces in the following month,\textsuperscript{33} sixty agents with the Christian Commission had one last opportunity to spread the gospel when the armies of Grant and Sherman gathered near Washington.\textsuperscript{34} E. P. Goodwin wrote about a revival in the Provisional camp which seems to have begun even before the chapel was erected. After touring the camp and sensing an almost hopeless situation due to vileness of its inhabitants, Goodwin recounted his meeting with one soldier who renewed his hope:

\begin{quote}
Just as we were ready for our lunch of crackers and bacon, a pleasant-looking soldier came to me, and with an earnest look drew me to aside to ask if there was to be preaching in our chapel that evening. Upon my replying that there was to be, his eyes filled forthwith with tears, and an expression of devout thanks broke from his lips. His personal experience was a very remarkable one. A sailor for nine years, he had been a very wicked man. Nothing had arrested him in his course, until a few evenings previous, passing a tent, he heard some Christian soldier singing. He was struck by the melody, so much so that the music kept ringing in ears constantly. He unbosomed himself to his comrade; they went together to find the tent, but could not. Their consciences were now, however, thoroughly awake, and they agreed
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30}Shattuck, \textit{A Shield and Hiding Place}, 89.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 89-91.


\textsuperscript{33}CivilWar.com: The Home of the Civil War, “Timeline,” [on-line]; accessed 22 October 2008; available from http://www.civilwar.com/content/section/16/42; Internet.

\textsuperscript{34}Smith, \textit{Incidents of the United States Christian Commission}, 388.
among themselves that they ought to be better men. Finally, [the soldier] told his comrade that talking would not make them any better. The other suggested prayer. They did not know anything about praying, however. And it was not until after considerable hesitation that they got down on their knees. They confessed their common sins as well as they could, asked forgiveness, and found that prayer helped them very much. So they continued a day or two, working without encouragement from any about them, until it suddenly occurred to them that they were selfish about the matter, so they agreed to try and get in some of their comrades. They were successful, and after that had an evening prayer meeting at their tent, consisting of about ten men.35

This soldier along with approximately150 others was present at the first chapel meeting.36

When the chaplain asked only those interested in participating in a time of prayer and testimony to remain, he was amazed to find that not a man had gotten up to leave.37

Every night from that point until the camp was dispersed, the fires of revival led three to fifteen people to publicly ask for intercession.38

Revival in the Confederate Army

The Christian Labor

While revivals among the Union soldiers experienced considerable success especially as the tide of victory turned in their favor, the mounting defeats and poor armaments led the Confederate armies to an even greater revival. From the war’s beginning, the ranks of the Confederate army were filled with preachers, Sunday School teachers, Methodist class leaders, and deacons. Before the war, Church attendance in the South, according to John W. Brinsfield, may have included approximately sixty-four

36Ibid., 390.
37Ibid., 390-1.
38Ibid., 391.
percent of the population with twenty-five percent being Church members.\textsuperscript{39} Many soldiers, both officers and enlisted men, were rooted in the faith or at least aware of it before the war even started. Gamaliel Bradford describes General Robert E. Lee, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, as a very committed Christian:

A devout Christian himself, he thought of each man in his army as a soul to be saved, and in every way he could, encouraged the mission and revival work which went on all through the war with ever-increasing activity. Even in the midst of urgent duty he would stop and take part in a camp prayer meeting and listen to the exhortations of some ragged veteran, as a young convert might listen to an apostle.\textsuperscript{40}

While the Christians were no doubt helpful in the coming revival, William W. Bennett gives the most credit to the preachers, chaplains, and the religious literature that was distributed.\textsuperscript{41} A large proportion of Confederate chaplains came from the Methodists, and their ranks were composed of both the ordained and the laymen.\textsuperscript{42} Despite the presence of these Christians and the Christian literature, the pace of the revival at the beginning of war was very slow. Soldiers, who had recently left the cultural and relational restraints of their home, began to give themselves over to sins such as


\textsuperscript{40} Gamaliel Bradford, Jr. Lee the American (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 117.

\textsuperscript{41} William W. Bennett, A Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies During the Late Civil War Between the States of the Federal Union (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1989), 46. Bennett, the Superintendent of the Methodist’s Tract Association and an army chaplain, offers an eyewitness account of the revival among the Southern troops supplemented with the information that he obtained from a vast correspondence with other eyewitnesses.

\textsuperscript{42} John W. Brinsfield and John W. Brinsfield, Jr. The Spirit Divided: Memoirs of Civil War Chaplains: The Confederacy (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), 10. The authors note that of the 1308 documented chaplains, forty-percent were ordained. Of the 938 chaplains whose denominational affiliation was known, “forty-seven percent were Methodist, eighteen percent were Presbyterian, sixteen percent were Baptists, three percent were Roman Catholic, and less than one percent for five other denominations.”
swearing, gambling, and drinking.\textsuperscript{43} The initial sparks of revival among the unconverted and back-sliding soldiers would begin with the personal example of Christian soldiers, the chaplains, and the religious literature.

As the flames of revival became more visible, General Jackson issued a written appeal in the winter of 1862-1863 to the Presbyterian General Assembly asking for more preachers.\textsuperscript{44} This appeal and others like it led to a massive effort among the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists in the distribution of religious literature and the provision of pastors, missionaries, and evangelists to the army. In 1863, the Southern Baptist Convention resolved to send missionaries to the army by asking their churches to prayerfully consider their role in this task.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{The Role of Religious Literature}

Much of the press in the North started focusing on the thrill of victory and celebrations of superiority; the secular and religious Southern press, however, focused intently on the revival in their distributions.\textsuperscript{46} At first, the seeds of revival were sown to a large extent through distribution of the Bible, Testaments, and other religious literature which was frequently read by soldiers to break the monotony of life in the camps,

\textsuperscript{43}Bennett, \textit{Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies}, 31.

\textsuperscript{44}John Shepard, Jr., “Religion in the Army of Northern Virginia,” \textit{North Carolina Historical Review} 25 (1948): 349. 341-376

\textsuperscript{45}John W. Jones, \textit{Christ in the Camp or Religion in Lee’s Army} (Richmond, VA: B. F. Johnson, 1887), 393.

\textsuperscript{46}Harry S. Stout, \textit{Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War} (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 411.
hospitals, and trenches. Joseph Cross, an army chaplain, foresaw the usefulness of the ministry of the printed word in a statement he made in the winter of 1861-1862:

The soldiers here (in Western Virginia) are starving for reading matter. They will read anything. I frequently see a piece of newspaper, no larger than my hand, going the rounds among them. If the bread of life were now offered them through the printed page, how readily they might be led to Christ. 47

The Baptists of Virginia were the first to get involved in the distribution of religious literature in May 1861. 48 By 1863, several other denominations and religious organizations had entered this ministry. The other churches and religious organizations waited until the latter part of 1862 and 1863 to enter into this ministry. Kurt O. Berends states that the churches moved from their traditional local ministries only once they began to see the “armies as a permanent institution.” 49 The publications of the churches and religious organizations, which continued to be distributed even when many secular newspapers ceased to circulate, consisted of many small newspapers including The Soldier’s Friend (Baptist), The Soldier’s Visitor (Presbyterian); The Soldier’s Paper (Methodist), Army and Navy Messenger and Army and Navy Messenger for the Trans-Mississippi Department (Evangelical Tract Society). 50 From 1861 through 1864, Sidney J. Romero reports on the total amount of pages distributed by the various groups: Baptists

47Jones, Christ in the Camp, 174.

48Ibid., 156.

49Kurt O. Berends, “Wholesome Reading Purifies and Elevates the Man: The Religious Military Press in the Confederacy,” in Religion and the American Civil War, ed. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles R. Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 132. 131-166. These papers had large distributions. Perhaps the largest was the The Soldier’s Paper with a purported distribution of 20,000 semi-monthly. Berends also notes that churches only joined the religious press ministry after revival started occurring among the soldiers and also after a largely unsuccessful ministry at home.

(80,887,000), Evangelical Tract Society (78,000,000), Presbyterians (15,031,750), and Methodists (20,162,721).  

This soldier’s desire for the printed word, according to Bennett, extended to Bibles and Testaments as well. The importance of the religious literature in the revival cannot be underestimated as seen in this story from a Confederate soldier:

“When I entered the army,” said a soldier, “I was the chief of sinners. I did not love God, nor my soul, but pursued the ways of unrighteousness with ardor, without ever counting the cost. I studiously shunned preaching and our faithful chaplain, lest he should reprove me; and when he was preaching in the camp I would be in my tent gambling with my wicked companions. One day he presented a tract entitled, ‘The Wrath to Come,’ and so politely requested me to read it that I promised him I would, and immediately went to my tent to give it a hasty perusal. I had not finished it until I felt that I was exposed to that wrath, and that I deserved to be damned. It showed me so plainly where and what I was, that I should have felt lost and without a remedy had it not pointed me to that glorious Refuge which has indeed been a refuge to me from the storm, for I now feel that I can trust in Christ.”

This story and many others like it are referred to in accounts from this period. The widespread circulation of religious literature not only led to many personal conversions but also helped to lay the seeds for the many conversions when the services of a chaplain, missionary, or preacher were available.

All papers sought to avoid controversies related to the doctrine of baptism and church governance; instead, they focused their attention on the delivery of the gospel message. Bennett speaks of several reports that said otherwise but finds them to be


53 Ibid., 83.

54 Berends, “Wholesome Reading Purifies and Elevates the Man,” 137.
unsubstantiated. Their various methods for making the gospel invitation included authentic as well as fictional gospel presentations, stories, and testimonies from loved ones, fellow soldiers, and chaplains. The most popular method used by the religious journals for sharing the gospel, however, discussed “the immediacy of death.” Both the gospel presenters and the gospel hearers had to face the issue of death on a frequent basis. The soldier had to face his mortality on the battlefield, while the chaplain had to share the gospel with men who may never be able to hear the gospel again.

Revivals in 1861–1862

By late 1862, according to one chaplain, “the romance of the soldier’s life wore off, [and] a more sober and serious mood seemed to prevail in the camps.” It was during this time after the loss at the Battle of Antietam, according to Drew G. Faust, that revival first broke out among the retreating troops. Bennett and John W. Jones, however, mention several outbreaks of revival among various regiments stationed in Virginia during the summer and autumn of 1861.

Revivals among the troops may have started with the rise in religious interest

55 Bennett, Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies, 279.
56 Berends, “Wholesome Reading Purifies and Elevates the Man,” 137-38.
57 Ibid., 139.
58 Ibid., 331.
60 Ibid., 332.
61 Bennett, Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies, 103-04, 117; Jones, Christ in the Camp, 267. Both Bennett and Jones record the same account of thirty conversions among the troops stationed at Ashland. Bennett speaks of another outbreak of revival among the troops in the 17th Mississippi regiment stationed at Leesburg.
in the fall of 1861, but it was certainly in full swing by the fall of 1862 and continued until the war’s end.\textsuperscript{61} In the summer of 1862, however, Bennett reports outbreaks of revival in regiments all across the South.\textsuperscript{62} At this time, Melvin Dwinnell, a Yankee Rebel, observed a “quiet revival” stirring in the soldier’s hearts to the extent that the attendance of evening prayer meetings swelled in numbers, and outside of those meetings, many could be observed daily in quiet prayer and Bible study.\textsuperscript{63} Dwinnell’s account of the revival occurring with far less emotional excess than previous revivals is the general picture for all revivals occurring among the armies of the North and South.

By the fall of 1862, soldiers, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, still expressed themselves fervently through singing in the protracted services where many were converted.\textsuperscript{64} During this same period, the Western armies were much less stationery than their counterparts in Virginia. Despite this fact, Bennett testifies to the personal examples set by many Christians within their regiments at this time.\textsuperscript{65} The outbreak of the revival, by this point, had come to the attention of President Lincoln who said on September 15, 1862:

\begin{quote}
Why, the rebel soldiers are praying with a great deal more earnestness, I fear, than our own troops, and expecting God to favor their side; for one of our soldiers, who had been taken prisoner, told Senator Wilson, a few days since, that he met with
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{61}Berends, “Wholesome Reading Purifies and Elevates the Man,” 135.
\textsuperscript{63}Warren Wilkinson and Steven E. Woodworth, \textit{A Scythe of Fire: Through the Civil War with One of Lee’s Most Legendary Regiments} (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 155.
\textsuperscript{64}Bennett, \textit{Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies}, 205-06, 207-10. Bennett notes that in the absence of a minister, prayer meetings would often occur following the worshipful singing.
\textsuperscript{65}Bennett, \textit{Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies}, 226.
nothing so discouraging as the evident sincerity of those he was among in their prayers. 66

Revivals in 1863–1864

Robert F. Bunting, a chaplain with the Confederate 8th Texas Cavalry, was praying for revival among his soldiers in November 1862. 67 Bunting began holding protracted services in the winter and spring of 1863 and then eventually held nightly services for over two weeks in July. By August, George Q. Turner reported that one hundred people had “either professed, been baptized, or are now under conviction.” 68

By the winter of 1862-1863, the revival among the western armies fanned to flame with such a great intensity that even regiments without a minister were no less affected. 69 In the spring of 1863, revival broke out among the Confederate troops stationed at Fredericksburg and spread to the surrounding camps. Robert Stiles offers a first-hand account of the revival at Fredericksburg by one of its attendants:

After my arrival we held three meetings a day--a morning and afternoon prayer-meeting and a preaching service at night. We could scarcely ask of delightful religious interest more than we received. Our sanctuary has been crowded, lower floor and gallery. Loud, animated singing always hailed our approach to the house of God; and a closely-packed audience of men, amongst whom you might have searched in vain for one white hair, were leaning upon the voice of the preacher as if God himself had called them together to hear of life and death eternal. At every call


68 Ibid., 123.

69 Bennett, Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies, 247-60. Bennett tells of one revival where 140 souls were converted in just two weeks. When no minister was present, Christian soldiers would fill the gap and lead hundreds to Christ by testifying around the camp-fire, holding prayer meetings, reading the Bible, and encouraged one another daily.
for the anxious, the entire altar, the front six seats of the five blocks of pews surrounding the pulpit, and all the spaces thereabouts ever so closely packed, could scarcely accommodate the supplicants.\textsuperscript{70}

Despite the powerful preaching at these meetings, Stiles preferred the time for singing, prayer, and sharing testimony which lasted at least an hour before the sermons.\textsuperscript{71}

W. C. Dunlap observed that after the revival meetings around Fredericksburg, many soldiers would have prayer meetings in the fields at night and sometimes remained in prayer until after midnight.\textsuperscript{72} The revival in the spring of 1863 continued throughout most Confederate regiments. Even in the absence of chaplains, soldiers would have prayer meetings and share the gospel which led to still more conversions.\textsuperscript{73} Stiles reports that the revival in Barksdale’s Brigade continued through the battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville all the way to the battle of Gettysburg.\textsuperscript{74}

Bennett notes that the pace of revival continued unimpeded and even increased in intensity in the summer of 1863 among most regiments despite the battles and long hours of marching.\textsuperscript{75} He gives the following account of a scene as recorded by a Confederate soldier:

[W]e had a very interesting little meeting in the trenches. It began with some of the battalion singing. One by one the different regiments collected around and joined in.

\textsuperscript{70}Robert Stiles, \textit{Four Years Under Marse Robert} (New York: Neale, 1903), 140.

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., 140-43. Stiles provides some first-hand accounts of some testimonies that were shared.

\textsuperscript{72}Bennett, \textit{Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies}, 254.

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., 259-60.

\textsuperscript{74}Stiles, \textit{Four Years Under Marse Robert}, 139.

\textsuperscript{75}Bennett, \textit{Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies}, 308, 311.
Soon it was turned into a prayer-meeting, and it proved to be one of the most interesting scenes I had witnessed for a long time.\textsuperscript{76}

In the fall of 1863, Jones reports that thousands of souls were being won to Christ every week.\textsuperscript{77} The revival continued among most regiments of the Confederacy throughout the winter of 1863-1864 and the summer of 1864. A revival broke out on June 10, 1864 at Confederate encampments in southern Arkansas that led to one thousand conversions.\textsuperscript{78} Bennett reports that the revival continued during the winter of 1864 with many chaplains having large numbers gathered at their meetings.\textsuperscript{79}

**The Role of Hospitals**

Hospitals, a place where many souls entered heaven through deathbed conversions, often served as a location and a source for revival. Soldiers, who were wounded and needing care, were often converted through the ministries of medical staff, chaplains, and lay people who ministered at the many hospitals. Bennett recounts the story of wounded soldiers who returned from the hospital to his regiment and started a prayer meeting among five comrades that grew larger and led to one hundred conversions when a minister was finally able to preach to them.\textsuperscript{80} A. E. Dickinson, a Baptist in charge

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., 310-11.


\textsuperscript{78}Bennett, *Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies*, 347-49. Bennett relates a first-hand account from one of the ministers who claimed that the “young converts” along with their lost friends among the camp at Three-Creeks would spend “the whole night singing, praying, and praising God.”

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., 412.

\textsuperscript{80}Ibid., 153.
of colportage ministry, commented on the favorable atmosphere within hospitals for gospel message:

   The hospitals afford a most inviting field for religious effort. The solemn quiet and serious reflections which pervade the soul of the sick soldier, who far away from home and friends, spends so many hours in communing in his own heart, is very conducive to religious improvement.\textsuperscript{81}

In the summer of 1862, one chaplain writes that post-battle conversions became as common to hospital setting as the appearance of the wounded.\textsuperscript{82}

**The Role of Prisons**

   The conditions at military prisons in both the North and the South were horrid. At one Union prison, Elmira, 2,980 of the 12,147 Confederate inmates died.\textsuperscript{83} At a prisoner of war camp for Rebel soldiers in Elmira, New York, non-denominational services were held by the local clergy where crowds of up to two thousand prisoners would gather for singing, praying, and listening to sermons.\textsuperscript{84} L. B. Jones, a prisoner in the camp, reported that many requested prayer during these meetings.\textsuperscript{85} When services were not being held, prayer meetings would take place where soldiers could be seen publicly kneeling and praying.\textsuperscript{86} In Union prison camps, such as Johnson’s Island,

\begin{itemize}
   \item \textsuperscript{81}Jones, *Christ in the Camp*, 177.
   \item \textsuperscript{82}Bennett, *Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies*, 177.
   \item \textsuperscript{83}James I. Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 206.
   \item \textsuperscript{84}Michael P. Gray, *The Business of Captivity: Elmira and Its Civil War Prison* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2001), 111.
   \item \textsuperscript{86}Gray, *The Business of Captivity*, 112.
\end{itemize}
Confederate soldiers were converting in large numbers. An account from a Confederate prisoner at Johnson’s Island, provided by Jones, spoke of a Christian prisoner who set about the Lord’s work until the majority of those dwelling in the prison were deeply affected and many converted.

Prayer meetings, Bible studies, and Christian services also took place at Confederate prisons like those in Andersonville. T. J. Sheppard, a prisoner at Andersonville, claimed to have witnessed one hundred conversions. Throughout the prison systems of both sides, the gospel was being spread by both the prisoners and even local ministers.

**Impact of Civil War Revivals**

By January 1865, Bennett estimates that conversions among Confederate soldiers to be 150,000, while Jones, admitting that his estimate is “too low,” provides a more conservative estimate of fifteen thousand conversions. In the December 1864 issue of the *Army and Navy Messenger*, W. B. Wellons, according to Berends, wrote

> It is estimated that no less than *one hundred and forty-thousand* soldiers in the Confederate army have been converted during the progress of the war, and it is

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87 Clement A. Evans, *Confederate Military History: A Library of Confederate States History*, vol. 12 (Atlanta: Confederate, 1899), 184. Evans quotes the *Southern Presbyterian* in which an officer was said to have numbered the conversion at about one hundred.


91 Ibid., 413; Jones, *Christ in the Camp*, 390-91.
father [sic] estimated that fully one-third of the soldiers now in the field are praying men and member of some one of the different religious denominations. Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., relying on numerous sources, states that at least one hundred thousand soldiers were converted. Eugenia H. Arnold agrees with the estimate provided by Shattuck. If Livermore’s estimate that the Confederate army was composed of 1,234,000 individuals during the course of the war is correct, then between eight and twelve percent of those enlisted were converted.

The total number of converts from the Union army revivals is unknown due to chaos caused by the constant change in circumstances of both the soldiers and the ministers. Thomas L. Livermore estimates that the Union army was composed of 2,698,304 individuals. Shattuck, James H. Moorhead, and Ronald D. Rietveld estimate that the revivals encouraged countless numbers of Christian soldiers and led to anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 converts within the Union army. This would mean that somewhere between 3.7 and 7.4 percent of the soldiers were converted.

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92 Berends, “Wholesome Reading Purifies and Elevates the Man,” 135.

93 Shattuck, A Shield and Hiding Place, 96.


95 Thomas L. Livermore, Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-1865 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1900), 63.

96 Ibid., 1.

Conclusion

While the end of the war brought the army camp revivals to an end, the effects of revival remained both with those newly converted and the many Christians who had served the cause of Christ through their ministries. Both those who were converted and those who knew Christ before the war were profoundly impacted by the movement of God’s Spirit. Perhaps the most unique aspect of the revivals during the Civil War is the large number of male converts who were added to the church roles.

Many Confederate veterans served as preachers like Robert Dabney and revivalists like James B. Gambrell and J. William Jones.98 Soldiers in the North and the South returned to their homes and caused a noticeable increase in church attendance. In Virginia, some of the veterans returned home only to take leading roles in the revival that continued to sweep through Virginia in 1865 even after the war’s end.99

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