For One Am Ready to Do My Part: The Initial Motivations That Inspired Men from Northern Illinois to Enlist in the U.S. Army, 1861-1862

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Wayne N. Duerkes

Illinoisans! Look at the issue and do not falter. Your all is at stake. What are your beautiful prairies, comfortable mansions and rich harvests? – What is even life worth, if your government is lost? Your all and your children’s all—all that is worth living or dying for, is at stake. Then rally once again for the old flag, for our country, union and liberty.

Richard Yates, August 5, 1862

In April 1861, in response to the firing on Fort Sumter, President Abraham Lincoln called for seventy-five-thousand volunteers to fill the ranks of the U.S. army. The response was immediate and overwhelming. Men residing in the northern states enlisted in such numbers that thousands had to be turned away, many then joining units from other states. During the first two years of the war, Illinois mustered over eighty-thousand men into Federal service. Of these men, seventeen-thousand or 21 percent came from the fourteen northern most counties of the state, excluding Cook County. During the first two years of the war, over one-quarter of all military-age males from northern Illinois enlisted.¹

Scholars have devoted considerable effort to determining who enlisted in the Union army and to understanding their motivation for doing so. But their research is heavily focused on the eastern states. Historians have neglected to undertake a study of motivations for enlisting in the rural Midwest. Rural northern Illinois, a region that excludes Cook County and Chicago, provides an excellent place to determine whether the motivations that historians have identified as important also inspired ordinary Midwesterners to enlist.²

James McPherson, in his For Cause and Comrades, examines a representative cross section of the volunteer forces to determine why men fought
in the Civil War. His analysis shows preservation of the union, patriotism, and concerns about masculine identity as key to understanding the motivations of early volunteers. McPherson borrows from John A. Lynn a nomenclature useful for understanding volunteers’ motivations for enlisting and fighting in wars. Lynn’s nomenclature breaks into three useful categories the motivation of fighting men: initial, sustaining, and combat. Initial motivation refers to forces that drove volunteers to leave family and friends and to prepare for war. Sustaining motivation explains why men stayed in the military during wartime. The hardships of camp life and the potential for combat, death, and disease ensured that not all who volunteered remained in the fight. Finally, combat motivation seeks to determine why men fought. During the Civil War, large numbers of men “faced the elephant”—military slang for confronting actual combat—and Lynn uses combat motivation to explain why volunteers fought despite “the overwhelming presence of fear.”

A desire to preserve the Union accounted for the initial motivation of significant numbers of volunteers from northern Illinois who enlisted in the army. That desire was nurtured in an atmosphere of patriotic fervor. The fervor owed to their understanding of national history, which they used to cast themselves as the heirs of the revolutionary generation and as the protectors of liberty and freedom. The southern states’ refusal to accept the popular election of Lincoln and their insistence on the right to secede challenged northern views of the national union and the meaning of the election of 1860. Starting in April 1861, men in northern Illinois were presented with the opportunity to act upon those beliefs. Defense of their nation was not the only issue that dwelled on the hearts and minds of the volunteers. Volunteers also approached things more pragmatically. Men saw an opportunity to advance themselves in life through military service. Financial gains, upward mobility in social status, and, in some cases, just a simple break from the boredom prevalent in youth all presented tantalizing opportunities to elevate themselves or their families beyond what they had known prior to the conflict.

After weeks of building tension, the government of the Confederate States of America demanded U.S. Major Robert Anderson stationed at Fort Sumter in South Carolina to officially evacuate the fort on April 11, 1861.
Negotiations failed to appease both sides on a timeline for removal of Federal forces; and, on April 12, 1861, artillery batteries under the command of General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter, which surrendered the following day. Civil War had begun.

On April 15, 1861, Lincoln declared an insurrection, which by law authorized him to call up militia in the various states to suppress hostilities. He initially called for seventy-five-thousand men for three months of service. In his carefully worded proclamation, Lincoln appealed to “all loyal citizens to favor, facilitate and aid this effort to maintain the honor, the integrity, and the existence of our National Union, and perpetuity of popular government; and to redress wrongs already long enough endured.” Well aware of the need for public approval to suppress the rebellious states, Lincoln rested his appeal on defense of the Union and his popularly-elected government. The phrase “wrongs already long enough endured” was calculated to appeal to all northerners, even Democrats, who had long felt subjugated to the demands and threats of the southern states.4

That night, Secretary of War Simon Cameron sent a message to the Governor of Illinois, Richard Yates, requesting six regiments of militia. Specifically, the Secretary of War requested that the state detach from the militia 4,683 officers and men. According to regulations sent forth by the Secretary of War, each regiment mandated a total of 780 officers and men. With a total of six regiments requested, the quota per regulations would account for 4,680, only three shy of the initial request. In 1860 Illinois had a total white male population of 898,952 of which 297,557 were men between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine years of age. Yates’s first call required only 1.6 percent of Illinois males of fighting age to answer it. A man of fighting age had roughly a one in a hundred chance of making the first call up.5

Governor Yates had already prepared for just such an eventuality. Hours before receiving the message from the Secretary of War, he issued General Order #1. It stated that commanders of all militia units “in view of the present dangers…and the probability of an immediate call…for troops” should take steps to prepare their men for service. In an official proclamation, issued on April 23, Yates announced that Illinois would render assistance to the government “in preserving the Union, enforcing the laws, and protecting the property and rights of the people.” Within ten days of

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Lincoln’s proclamation, over ten-thousand men, more than twice as many as needed, responded to the call and a force had been sent to the most strategic point in the state, Cairo.6

The response was overwhelming. In a special session of Congress on the Fourth of July 1861, Lincoln declared, “The call was made; and the response...was most gratifying; surpassing...the most sanguine expectation.” Harper’s Weekly reported that “No one who has seen the recent manifestations of the popular sentiment of the North can doubt that the Northern blood is up, and that they will listen no more to talk of compromise, truce, or treaty, until they are fairly beaten.” Indeed, three months after the firing on Fort Sumter, Governor Yates remained besieged by hordes of men willing to do their part. Initially, many men had to be turned away. Thomas S. Mather, Illinois Adjutant General, reported that “among the most touching and painful incidents, indicating the patriotic fervor of our people at that time, noticed in the preparation of these troops for the field, was the rejecting from their companies these surplus volunteers.” He further noted that “strong men, who had left their homes at an hour’s notice to enter the service of their country, wept at the disappointment of being refused admission to their companies on muster day.”7

Most citizens, North and South, had figured the war to last only a few months. The need for legions of men was considered unnecessary. Men were left desperate to get into any company. To make matters worse, the War Department only authorized 780 men per regiment, whereas the Illinois militia had mustered 937 men per regiment, causing officials and officers to thin the ranks even further. In a letter to his wife, Onley Andrus shared the frustration with the thinking process. He learned “the story that they were culling so close that a great many were being thrown out. The hopes & fears of many were worked up to fever heat in a very short space of time.” Andrus was not a victim of military downsizing. Some companies resorted to drawing lots for positions, while others pulled out married men. Reports exist of men paying others up to fifty dollars for the opportunity to take their place.8

Yates, by the middle of May, aware that the war was no ninety-day affair, called on each of the nine congressional districts to provide an additional regiment. The men initially culled from militia units who remained in
Springfield formed the nucleus of the tenth additional regiment. Most of these men hailed from Cook, DeKalb, LaSalle, and Will counties. On August 12, 1861, Yates impressed upon the War Department the need for these men. “Additional regiments having been filled up, and the people of the State, as one man, humiliated at the disastrous defeat at Bull Run, on the 21st of July, were pressing upon me for acceptance.” The war had changed and the need for men grew rapidly. By December 3, 1861, Illinois had forwarded to the War Department fifty-eight infantry regiments, plus cavalry and artillery. At this point, Yates was ordered by Washington to cease all recruiting.9

Preservation of the Union was the most predominate sentiment expressed by men who signed up for service. With their sense of nationalism attacked by the southern states, communities across northern Illinois became hotbeds of patriotism and Union upon receiving news of the firing on Fort Sumter. The national standard and other patriotic banners appeared suddenly at every house and business. The flag became the symbol of patriotism and the rallying point to which men were called. From all levels of government, politicians cried for the preservation of the Union and for men to “protect the flag.” In Illinois, party lines disintegrated. On April 25, 1861, prominent Illinois Democrat Stephen A. Douglas made an impassioned speech to the state legislature that helped solidify a united cause: “Now that all else has failed, there is but one course left, and that is to rally, as one man, under the flag of Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, and Franklin.” Evoking the unity of the founding fathers, Douglas cautioned his fellow Democrats so recently vanquished in the presidential election that “you will be false and unworthy of your principles if you allow political defeat to convert you into traitors to your national land. Gentlemen, it is our duty to defend our Constitution and protect our flag.”10

Just days before, on April 16, John Rawlins expressed a similar sentiment in the town hall meeting held in Galena in Jo Daviess County: “I have been a Democrat all my life; but this is no longer a question of politics. It is simply Union or disunion, country or no country. I have favored every honorable compromise, but the day for compromise is past. Only one course is left for us. We will stand by the flag of our country and appeal to the God of Battles!” Rawlins later served on the staff of Ulysses S. Grant, a fellow Galena citizen, who was in the crowd that night. At the same public
meeting, U.S. Representative Elihu B. Washburne presented proposals that were unanimously adopted. The proposals were simplistic in their sentiment. They called on Jo Daviess residents to “support the government,” to sustain the “integrity of the American flag,” and reminded them that “having lived under the stars and stripes” they should “die under them.”

Within days, other towns held well-attended meetings and adopted similar resolutions. The resolutions were preceded by well-received patriotic and political speeches. At a town hall meeting held in Sandwich in DeKalb County, Augustus Adams, a senator from that district, spoke of the stars and stripes and proclaimed that, “he was willing to give a cherished son to help fight the battle of freedom.” In response, the cheering and shouting crowd unfurled a large flag. Early recruiting notices capitalized on the surge of patriotism. In his announcement, Captain B. B. Howard appealed to the emotions of patriotic men when he asked for “all those that are willing to volunteer, and are in favor of the Union, the enforcement of the laws, protection to our flag” to enlist immediately. His appeal had the desired effect; Howard’s company was full within days.

The strength of the sentiment towards Union, popularly-elected government, and the flag permeates the letters of the men who answered the call to duty. “[W]e at once signed our names...and [I] considered it my duty to help defend the flag,” wrote Henry Eby to his family in Mendota in LaSalle County. Eby knew that others shared his sentiments. Among his compatriots, “Patriotism ran high...the government should be defended at all hazards.” Silas Dexter Wesson, a farmer from Victor Township in DeKalb County, enlisted in 1861 and served the entire war. He displayed his love of country by signing his letters, “yours for the union.” After enlisting, Luther Lee Hiatt from Wheaton later described his reason for joining as, “defense of one of the best governments on earth.” The patriotic feelings not only encouraged men to join but also entrapped them in the moment. William H. L. Wallace, a brigadier general from Ottawa in LaSalle County who was later mortally wounded at Shiloh, wrote to his wife “that the step I have taken is not only right, but [one] I could not avoid. The country demands the services of her citizens in the field.” Some men were more romantic in their sentiments for love of country. Throughout the war,
Albert O. Marshall from Mokena in Will County kept a journal. In an early entry, he states, "If I have not my loved country to live in, I have nothing to live for. If this is to be its end, let it also be mine." 13

In many cases the feeling of love of country grew substantially as time went on. Despite the hardships of camp life coupled with the death and destruction witnessed by the men throughout the war, men drew a close and personal bond with the thought of Union. Men who had once thought of the old Union that they inherited from their forefathers began to describe themselves as defenders of their country they were destined to hand off to their children. Early in his service, George W. Pepoon wrote home: "Life to me is sweet, but I fear not death in the service of his country. And [if] I should fall I feel certain that my children and friends will tell with pride, to coming generations that I died in the defense of the best Government the sun ever shone upon." 14

The feelings of patriotism were fed by means other than patriotic and political speeches. Sermons, poetry, and music played significant roles in motivating men to action. Sermons were powerfully effective tools of persuasion. The direction to which sermons were focused can be extracted from their titles. "The Madness of the Southern Rebellion and the Duty of the Patriot" and "The Nation’s Peril and the Citizen’s Duty" are examples of sermons given in April 1861 that were designed to influence men's decisions. On April 18, 1861, Dr. Nahum E. Ballou addressed the members of the Methodist church in Sandwich with a stirring speech on patriotism and duty. His extraordinary oration was published in that week's edition of the Sandwich Gazette so that the entire community could be roused by his orders to "Strike for your country, God, and your native land!" His sermon inspired Daniel Ballou, his younger brother, to join the Union cause. 15

Clergymen had great influence over prospective volunteers. The religious beliefs and convictions instilled in the men by their religious leaders were displayed in their correspondence. Francis Bowman from St. Charles in Kane County wrote to his wife: "The future is in the hands of the Great Giver of all good, and let his will be done." Bowman was initially so motivated that he sold his half of a prosperous hardware business and moved his wife and two children in with relatives to accept the captaincy of the St. Charles Light Guard he had helped organize in 1854. Silas Wesson
recalled that he and his fellow enlistees had sworn to serve the government by exclaiming “SO HELP YOU GOD!” and George Pepoon clearly summarized the marriage of God and country in a letter to a friend, “I religiously believe in…our cause”\textsuperscript{16}

Speeches and sermons were supported by music and poetry to surround men with a constant barrage of patriotic appeals. Numerous examples of town hall meetings breaking out into patriotic songs or the delivery of a poem between honored speakers exist. On April 21, 1861, Orville Hickman Browning, who was appointed by Governor Yates to fill the U. S. Senate seat left open by the death of Stephen Douglas, noted in his diary that at a meeting “the ‘Star Spangled Banner’ was sung [with] five or six thousand joining the Chorus.” The \textit{Star Spangled Banner} was not the only patriotic song on the lips of rural Illinoisans at the time. In 1862 George F. Root wrote the song \textit{“The Battle Cry of Freedom,”} which asked the boys to “rally round the flag.” In July 1862, when Governor Yates called for more troops, the men in the 92nd Illinois from Ogle, Stephenson, and Carroll counties sang the tune as they signed the muster rolls. On April 30, 1861, famed poet Bayard Taylor penned a poem, “To the American people” that also combined God and country. The poem found its way into publications across the northern states:

Throughout the land there goes a cry;  
A sudden splendor fills the sky;  
From every hill the banner burst,  
Like buds by April breezes nurst;  
In every hamlet, home and mart,  
The firebeat of a single heart  
Keeps time to strains whose pulses mix  
Our blood with that of Seventy-Six!

The shot whereby the old flag fell  
From Sumter’s battered citadel,  
Struck down the lines of party creed,  
And made ye One in soul and deed,—  
One mighty people, stern and strong,
To crush the consummated wrong;
Indignant with the wrath whose rod
Smites as the awful sword of God!

Taylor’s description of men from “every hamlet, home and mart” coming together as one, like the men of the Revolutionary era, struck a chord with readers. One poem, found in many newspapers, was less polished but capable of catching the eye of the more common man. The author, who remains unknown, wrote:

A union of lakes, a union of lands—
A union that none can sever—
A union of hearts, a union of hands,
The American Union forever.

Songs and poems, like political speeches, immersed local men in an atmosphere of patriotic action.17

“They bring with them their unconquered prejudices in favor of freedom,” the May 1861 issue of Atlantic Magazine described the people of Illinois. Illinois was a free state and most people in the northern counties felt slavery was evil and wicked. The antipathy felt towards the plantation South had brewed for decades in the North. Since the constitutional debates, the South had virtually held white and black men hostage to further their desire to maintain peculiar southern social and economic values. Consequently, the outbreak of hostilities seemed to the people of the North a call for universal freedom. Most memoirs and regimental histories written after the war proudly expounded on the cause of Union and fighting for the freedom of the slaves. But, by in large, contemporary accounts of 1861 ignored the defense of black liberty as a reason for war or enlistment. Instead, rural northern Illinois men focused on the oppression that the South had forced onto the country.18

The most overt linkage between volunteering and freeing slaves came from religious leaders of academic institutions. Jonathan Blanchard of Wheaton College wrote to his wife after Fort Sumter indicating “slavery over this country would be a worse calamity than Civil War.” His students,
who published *The Beltonian Review*, had long been incensed at the peculiar institution and declared they would “be zealous advocate[s] of all reforms both Social, Religious, and Political” The students defended their ideology with action. In the book of graduating seniors at Wheaton College for the year of 1861, President Blanchard entered, “Commencement not held. The College sent 67 young men into the U.S. Army.” One of those students, George F. Cram noted in his diary, “Let America set this example before the world and the time will soon come when freedom to all men of every race and color shall be universal, the long oppressed will find rest to their weary souls.”19

Conversely, during the autumn of 1862, Onley Andrus from Nunda in McHenry County wrote home to his wife, “I certainly hope that they…keep the Niggers where they belong. Which is in Slavery & the more I see of them the more I think so.” Despite his attitudes towards slaves and their emancipation on January 1, 1863, Andrus continued to fight hard. For his action at Vicksburg in July 1863, Andrus was promoted.20

For men in northern Illinois, freedom for blacks may not have been a direct draw to fight, but neither was it a major hindrance. George Pepoon was representative of men from northern Illinois who, as their service took them farther south, came face to face with slavery. Reviewing his letters over the course of the war, a transition occurred in his justification for volunteering. The development of his views on slavery and the war are unmistakable. His initial letters were full of patriotism. Gradually, he began to supplement his letters with his belief that “slavery should fall.” Towards the end of his service, his words are much more direct and bold. He came to consider the South “a land cursed and blighted by that hideous Demon Slavery. It is the Pandora box whence all our troubles come. Thank God its days are numbered.” Patriotic fervor, a sentiment sufficient to rouse men to enlist, was replaced by the reality of the war’s importance, a decisive understanding that sustained men’s motivation to serve and fight.21

While patriotic fervor and concerns about slavery moved men from northern Illinois to enlist, they also enlisted for intensely personal reasons. Masculinity, reputation, and personal affections moved men to volunteer. Proving one’s masculinity forms a pivotal moment in a young man’s life. Maintaining his right to be called a man determines how others judge him.
Therefore, whether a rural, northern Illinoisan considered a neighbor, family member, or a female companion, the desire to be thought of as a man was very personal. The fear of being labeled a coward within a man's community had graver consequences than death. Just prior to the invasion at Fort Henry in February 1862, Luther Cowan noted in his diary that his men from Warren in Jo Daviess County were concerned about showing themselves as men. He revealed his concern about reputation above all other qualities when he prayed: “I believe the boys are all ready to go in. God grant that we shall show ourselves men.” Francis Bowman wrote to his wife indicating how much he missed her and longed to come home. He had contemplated resigning in early March 1862. A few days later, fearing the shame resignation would bring to the family, he rapidly sent another letter warning his wife not to share with anyone about his thought of resigning. In early April 1862, Bowman valiantly held his ground during the Battle of Shiloh and survived the engagement. Twelve days later, after proving that he was no coward, Bowman resigned his commission. Almost a month later, during his return trip home, he still worried about how his wife viewed him: “Wouldn’t you advise me to return to the Army?” Bowman never returned to the Army. He had joined and stayed long enough to avoid the label “coward.”

Many men wrote home chastising those who did not display Bowman’s bravery. “All such who shout union and loyalty but take very good care to keep out of the way of the Rebels…are to [too] Cowardly to come down here and fight,” John Norton from Galena wrote to his mother. Men noted that they wished only to join leaders who cried “come boys” from in front of their troops and who thereby demonstrated the manly characteristics of leadership and bravery on the battlefield. The men came to despise those who sat at home and pushed from relative safety to “go boys.” A. Levi Wells from Kaneville in Kane County named some of the cowards: “But I am sorry to say that there are some in your midst whose patriotism don’t amount to much. Such men as W L Perry, P Flanders, D Nard, and others.” Robert Hale Strong shared similar sentiments, “I remember the public meetings…how G.F. and his father blew the fife and beat the drum and exhorted the men to rally ‘round the flag’. I remember, too, how G.F. and his father did not do any ‘rallying’ themselves.” The bitterness that volunteers felt toward these
men became public. Commenting on which class of men he wished to be associated with, Luther Lee Hiatt said, “The boys that are now at home they are called cowards and everything else of the kind. I don’t think I should like to go by that name.”

To compound the issue, once the word circulated that the government might institute a draft, other men decided to join to avoid the stigma of becoming a draftee. Little delineation was made between a draftee and a coward. Only around 1.5 percent of the men from Illinois who served were drafted. William Coultrip, a farmer, from Somonauk in DeKalb County was reassigned to the 10th Illinois in 1864 after three years with his beloved 36th Illinois Infantry. He was reassigned at the same time that several dozen men were drafted into the 10th. Because of the unit’s association with draftees, his family later reported that Coultrip never recognized or talked about his time in the 10th. Additionally, some communities appealed to men to volunteer to avoid becoming drafted, in an effort to show a rival town which community had more loyalty and true, brave men.

Over 25 percent of the men in the northern part of Illinois were foreign born, and of all in the region, foreign-born men perhaps felt the most need to prove to the members of their community that they were loyal Americans worthy of citizenship. William Coultrip became a naturalized citizen in 1860 and felt it was his duty to prove himself worthy of that title. The distinct ethnic groups recruited amongst their own to fill the ranks, such as the Turner Society in Ottawa which busied itself with “getting their comrades to enlist.” The men of foreign birth went on to show their patriotism and loyalty by enlisting in droves. Years later, a captain from Princeton in LaSalle County delivered a speech describing their commitment: “There resided in Illinois…men of alien birth. These men were Unionists.” He added, “The foreign born citizens of Illinois…were as ready to share the perils of the moment as were their native-born neighbors.”

Enlisting to serve one’s country also served as a way to promote or maintain independent manhood within one’s family. Hundreds of young men were off to engage in the first real adventure of their lives. Their families knew that holding them back would undermine their chance to prove themselves. At first, Robert Hale Strong’s father held him back. But his son was concerned that the war would be over before he could enlist,
and he feared he would not “get a chance to win any glory.” Once released to serve, he wrote, “I walked straightway to Naperville and wrote my name as big as any man—I was going on nineteen—on the page among the other hero[es].” Edward E. Ayers from rural McHenry County, who had just prior to the outbreak of hostilities left his parents’ store to find glory in the west, was concerned about his future status in his community upon his return, as well as with his parents’ opinions of him: “It was my duty to participate in the fullest extent, and another very important reason was that it would be difficult for me to maintain my self-respect in all the years after the war if I did not participate.” Even more Ayers feared that “I wouldn’t dare to go home and face my Father and Mother if I had neglected the first opportunity of giving the Government my services.”

War has always offered successful soldiers who survive an opportunity to further themselves within their society. Ayers was astute enough to see this, as were others. William Wallace, a successful lawyer in Ottawa, whose political star was on the rise, knew well the implications and possibilities that the war presented. Wallace explained to his wife, “having the opportunity of going into the service for the war, we would justly and doubtless receive censure of all loyal people should we decline.” Like most men of vision, he defined his character by adding that “the impulses of patriotism and the desire for distinction in the war — the two great incentives to a soldier’s calling.” Luther Cowan presented his devotion to his manhood directly to his wife: “if we see battle, you will never be ashamed of the way I behave in it.” In March 1862, shortly after he survived the battles of Ft. Henry and Ft. Donelson, he told his wife, “I would rather die and lie unburied here in the woods or ditches than for the report ever to go home that I was a coward or afraid to die for need be in defence of my country.”

Men also saw the war as a chance to redeem themselves in the eyes of their families. Having failed to live up to the expectations of his family prior to the war, Onley Andrus felt the pressure to make something of his life. “You know I have been accused of being unsteady,” he wrote his wife, “and by those pretty near related to me too. Well as it is I am making money and with it we can begin to live.”

As Andrus hinted, money was a motivator to enlist. Private soldiers were paid thirteen dollars a month, but the wage could be just the tip of the
iceberg. Sign up bonuses, bounties, and family support funds were distributed to volunteers. For some of the volunteers, especially the young men just leaving home, the monthly salary was in and of itself an enticement. Bounty money, which could be paid in a lump sum or broken down over a few months to insure the men stayed with their company, was an extremely attractive bonus. Usually a percentage was paid upon enlistment and the remainder sometime after, depending on the entity that offered the bounty. Counties, townships, and communities all produced a separate bounty, and a young enlistee could receive numerous pay outs as they helped local governments meet enlistment quotas set by the governor. Governments in the northern-most counties in Illinois contributed over $13,700,000 in bounty money during the Civil War, which accounted for over 37 percent of the entire amount of bounty money raised in the state.28

Governments competed with each other to keep bounties high and to keep their young residents in local units. The scramble to join one of the select regiments during the early days of the war also cost counties several men to neighboring counties. In the spring of 1861, three-hundred men from LaSalle County left to join units in Chicago. When another call for troops was made in August, the county offered sixty dollar bounties to one-thousand men to fill the local ranks. The Board of Supervisors also voted to give each man an additional eight dollars as an equipment allowance, plus the board provided funds to support the families of the men for the next six months. In 1862 DeKalb County paid out $3,466 in bounty money in addition to what local communities gave. A year later, the county contributed one-hundred dollar bounties to each man who enlisted, plus twenty-five dollars for his family. Jo Daviess County immediately appropriated six-thousand dollars for bounties, whereas the city of Galena added a fifty dollar bonus for each of her local boys who joined the army. Galena citizens collected thousands of dollars to aid the families of these men. One young man in the 10th Illinois Infantry noted that, “we were paid in gold and silver, and with a thought in my mind that I would like to serve throughout the war,” he enlisted.29

For some men their motivation for joining was less influenced by civic duty or masculinity and more by money. With a steady income, men saw the opportunity to provide a better life for their family; other family men felt
the obligation to provide for the present as well as for the future. Luther Cowan informed his family of better days to come: “I had also resolved to change the course of my life in a measure; I am now as far as possible, after my duty to my family looking out for number one, trying to make money.” He added that his wife should not worry about the future, as he had the foresight to purchase a life insurance policy.30

The desire to appeal to female companions and friends was as strong a personal motivator for men to enlist as money. The participation and influence of women on men’s decisions was both direct and indirect. Young women’s presence at recruiting drives was deliberate and beneficial to achieve enlistment quotas. A chorus of young ladies singing songs with refrains like “I am Bound to be a Soldier’s Wife or Die an Old Maid” could propel young men to fight for the chance to sign the muster rolls. Newspapers encouraged female participation and promoted preferential treatment for volunteers, and editors instructed women to give their all to the men. “Whether father, husband, or brother, be ready and willing,” the Sandwich Gazette pronounced.31

Women gathered in hundreds of communities to provide aid for the men. “There was a meeting of the ladies called upon to prepare clothing for the soldiers. I hear the hall now fills with ladies and ten sewing machines,” one woman proudly informed her brother. Recruiting officials were aware that a uniform issued by the army would not have the same effect as one presented by the ladies of the men’s hometown. With the double distinction of a patriotic uniform made and presented by a local sweetheart, they hoped men would be enticed to enlist. The impact that the uniforms had on the men was electrifying: “the men were universally…proud at the change from jeans and satinets to the garb of soldiers of the United States of America.”32

In lavish presentation ceremonies, women also made and presented military companies with national and regimental colors. The pride felt by the men at these ceremonies was almost universally recounted in memoirs and journals. Flags bearing embroidered mottos such as, “Retaliation—no mercy to traitors!” displayed the resolve the women felt for the cause. In an address by Miss Ellen Fisher she announced to a crowd of young men, “Beloved soldiers: We present you this banner. It is the flag of our native...
land. It represents our dearest hopes for country, home and life. Our hands have made it, yours must defend it; and if needed for that purpose, the choicest blood in your veins, we doubt not, will be freely poured out.” She continued, “Our best wishes attend you. Our prayers will follow you; and if you fall in your country’s cause, we promise that your names shall be often spoken with tender pride, so long as we shall live. See to it that this flag is never insulted with impunity.”

After local townswnes presented colors in Galena, rounds of cheers answered Colonel John Eugene Smith when he responded that his command “promised that they should never trail [the flag] in the dust or be tainted with dishonor.” The women then prepared large feasts for the men once they were formed into companies. Wilson E. Chapel from Malta in DeKalb County noted in his journal, “Our company ‘F’ had, that day, been recipients of a grand dinner by the patriotic ladies...for which they received our heartfelt thanks.” Such attention to the volunteer’s welfare not only helped maintain morale of the new enlistees but was also witnessed by the other men in the area. The atmosphere of patriotic action completely enveloped the communities, which made avoidance of the excitement impossible, and volunteers were continually confronted on all fronts by the barrage of influence and encouragement to serve the country faithfully.

Abundant stories exist of the first wave of men leaving their hometowns to the cheers of their neighbors. Other men, who failed to join in the first wave of recruits, were awed by the power of the moment. “The show and pomp of war is fine and it is a fine thing to be stared at in wonder,” Luther Cowan described his departure in 1862. Henry Eby described an all too familiar scene in the earliest days of the war: “People came flocking into town from all the surrounding country and villages, with flags flying, to see the soldiers start off for the war.”

Enlistees also desired personal support from female family members. Many of the men would also come to grips with being away from these loved ones for the first time in their life. The men were mustered into companies at local camps scattered around northern Illinois, and camps transformed empty pastures or vacant fairgrounds into bustling little cities overnight. From these camps, men were shuffled to places like Camp
Douglas in Chicago. In the process, they were introduced to the basics of army life and begin drilling as units.

During their induction, men wrote constantly asking of news from home and from their families. They requested more letters to be sent to them. The rapidity of recruitment denied some men a chance to explain their decision or to receive a response. The initial letters from family received at these camps were the first opportunity to examine the reaction. Ann Wallace wrote to her husband William that “my knowledge of you and of our cause told me this would surely be the result. It does not surprise me.” She ended her letter by showing her support: “I will try to be a true soldier’s wife and bear my part in this work bravely.” Mary Quaid from Polo in Ogle County wrote to show her support to her brother, Oscar Samis. She attempted to conceal her grief when consoling her brother by using words he had used to console her: “[I] feel very bad that you have to rough it so and go dirty and lousy some of the time but as you say it is all for the union.” As time passed and new enlistees poured into the camps, the support and encouragement continued. “I am proud to say that the blood of my kindred has already flowed freely in this horrid war and I hope that none that belong to me will ever turn their backs on the glorious old flag.” Eldridge Skinner of Sandwich learned from his aunt. She went on to remind him to “Think of those dark days when Washington with his veteran soldiers with unshod and bleeding feet amid the frosts and snows of winter retreated before a victorious army, those were times ‘that tried men’s souls’ that shook the courage of the firmest. But remember what grand results followed.”

The atmosphere of patriotic action along with a myriad of personal reasons caused thousands of men from northern Illinois to set behind all they had to join the adventure of a life time. The momentum behind these first waves of volunteers catapulted further volunteer enlistments at home despite the human toll paid on the battlefield. As the war wore on, many men who had at first decided to sit out the hostilities gained courage from the example set by their neighbors. Personal pride, peer pressure, and money caused the late comers to follow in the footsteps of the first few waves of patriotic fighters. And when called upon, the volunteers did fight. As an unknown soldier who began his march south late in the war wrote to his mother, “I for one am ready whenever called for to do my part.”
Notes


10 Eddy, Patriotism, 74, 80.


14 George W. Pepoon to Betsey E. Shaw, 19 April 1863, George W. Pepoon Letters,
Regional Archives Center, Founders Memorial Library, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois.
15 Chicago Daily Tribune, 22 April 1861, 5; “An Address Delivered Before,” Sandwich Gazette, 15 April 1861, 3; Portraits and Biographical Album of DeKalb County, Illinois (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1885), 425.
16 Francis Bowman to wife, 18 April 1862, Frances Bowman Letters, Regional Archives Center, Founders Memorial Library, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois; Ibid; George W. Pepoon to Betsy E. Shaw, 13 August 1864, George W. Pepoon Letters, Regional Archives Center, Founders Memorial Library, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois.
21 George W. Pepoon to Betsey E. Shaw, 19 July 1863, George W. Pepoon Letters, Regional Archives Center, Founders Memorial Library, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois; George W. Pepoon to Betsey E. Shaw, 13 August 1864, Ibid.
22 Luther Cowan diary, 6 February 1862, Luther Cowan File, Alfred Mueller Historical Collections Room, Galena Public Library, Galena, Illinois; Francis Bowman to wife, 2 March 1862, Francis Bowman Collection, Regional Archives Center, Founders Memorial Library, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois; Francis Bowman to wife, 6 March 1862, Ibid; Francis Bowman to wife, 6 May 1862, Ibid.
25 Population of the United States in 1860, 104; Coultrip, One Tree—Many Branches, 90;

26 Strong, A Yankee Private’s Civil War, 1; Edward E. Ayers, Reminiscences of Edward Ayer’s First Trip from Home in 1861; His Journey Across the Plains; Work in the Mines; Arrival in San Francisco; Subsequent Enlistment and Service in the Army, and His Return Home in 1864, After a Period of Four and One-half Years (unknown: by author, unknown), 15.


30 Luther Cowan to Molly Cowan, 21 January 1862, Luther Cowan File, Alfred Mueller Historical Collections Room, Galena Public Library, Galena, Illinois.


35 Luther Cowan to Molly Cowan, 18 January 1862, Luther Cowan File, Alfred Mueller Historical Collections Room, Galena Public Library, Galena, Illinois; Eby, Observations, 16.

36 Wallace, W. H. L. Wallace, 118; Mary S. Quaid to Oscar Samis, 9 November 1863, John & Joyce Schmale Collection, Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois; J. A. Dickson to Eldridge Skinner, 5 April 1863, Author’s Collection.

37 Unknown to Mother, 29 April 1864, Roy Vincent Collection, Galena and U. S. Grant Museum, Galena, Illinois.