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**“COMMAND DUTIES OR, WHAT ARE THE OFFICERS DOING WHILE THE ENLISTED MEN DO ALL THE WORK?”
A TALK BY MARK PERKINS
SHELTER HOUSE, FRED FULLER PARK, KENT
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2023, AT 7:30 P.M.**

Ask someone to visualize a Civil War officer and it's likely the image they see is a man in a nice uniform astride a horse, or brandishing a sword, or yelling encouragement to his men during a gallant charge. However, officers, just as soldiers, spent only a small part of their time in battle. So what were the officers doing the rest of the time? (Think logistics, training and administration.) And when they were in battle, what exactly were they doing besides yelling? Come to think of it, what makes an officer good or bad at their job, anyway? In “Command Duties or, What Are the Officers Doing While the Enlisted Men Do All the Work?”, Mark Perkins will consider these questions and look at a few examples of how officers performed their command duties.

Mark Perkins grew up in Stow, Ohio, where he developed a life-long interest in history. After earning degrees in psychology and library science from the the University of Hawaii at Manoa and a degree in computer science from the University of Akron, he worked for 33 years as a programmer/analyst with Wolff Bros. Supply. His long-time interest in the Civil War included four years reenacting with the Fifth Texas Infantry, Company A, out of Akron, Ohio, and co-editing, with George Skoch, the book *Lone Star Confederate: A Gallant and Good Soldier of the Fifth Texas Infantry*. Published by Texas A&M University Press, the book won the 2004 “Best Book on Texas in the Confederacy” presented by the Texas Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans. Mark is a member of the Kent Civil War Society. He lives in Copley, Ohio with his wife, Frances, and cat, Cassie.

Although Mark won't be there, we will have our optional “meet-the-speaker” dinner at Eddy's Deli & Restaurant, 4581 Kent Road in Stow, beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Also, a note: starting in January, I will send out printed newsletters ONLY to those who request it specifically. If you do not want me to stop sending newsletters to you in the mail, please either email me at jrader@kent.edu, let me know at a meeting between now and then, or indicate it on your membership form when you return it with your dues.

Volunteer Officers

An interview with Dr. Andrew Bledsoe of Lee University by the Civil War Institute

Excerpted from: <https://www.gettysburg.edu/civil-war-institute/news/detail?id=fb7848db-7cd8-4949-9eca-f7945ebb4aeb&pageTitle=Speaker+Interview%3A+Andrew+Bledsoe+on+the+Junior+Officer+Corps>

CWI: How did most junior officers attain their ranks during the Civil War? Who comprised the junior officer corps? Were there notable differences between the Union and Confederate junior officer corps?

BLEDSOE: There were typically three paths to a junior officer's commission. Early on, the most common method was through the notorious election process, where volunteers chose their company and regimental officers by ballot. The election of officers seems peculiar to modern Americans, because we have become accustomed to the idea of a professional officer corps. For citizen-soldiers in the 19th century, however, officer elections had a long history rooted in the American militia ethos and were an important prerogative of the republicanism that informed their military service. Junior officers could also attain their ranks by appointment, either currying favor through patronage or "wire-pulling," or simply because of some demonstration of natural ability or merit. Finally, as the war dragged on and casualties and promotions mounted, experienced enlisted men were sometimes the recipients of battlefield commissions or were able to secure commissions in USCT regiments.

Other than obvious cultural and ideological disagreements on issues like slavery, union, emancipation, and secession, the junior officer corps of both Union and Confederate armies are striking for their similarities rather than their overt differences. I do think that it's important to remember that despite all their differences, Northerners and Southerners shared a mutual heritage and understanding of military service and the role of the citizen in American civic culture. That said, there were some differences. Junior officers tended to come from "gentlemanly" occupations before the war, with both Union and Confederate junior officers usually coming from professional, white-collar, farming, or skilled-artisan occupations in far greater proportions than enlisted men. Confederate junior officers were more likely to come from agricultural backgrounds than their Union counterparts. The most significant difference between Northern and Southern officers had to do with slavery. Some 40 percent of Confederate junior officers either owned slaves or lived in slaveholding households in the 1860 census slave schedules, much higher than the average slaveholding rate of all Confederate households. This definitely shaped the Confederate junior officer corps in a multitude of ways.

CWI: What leadership challenges did junior officers face, and why? What was the impact of the Civil War on Union and Confederate notions of military hierarchy and republican military traditions?

BLEDSOE: Company-grade officers often knew each volunteer in their unit personally, and officers' actions could dictate whether their men lived or died. This was an exceptionally difficult environment in which to establish military authority. Enlisted volunteers expected their officers to treat them as equal citizens, but to lead with competence and effectiveness. The tension between these two fundamental expectations, respect versus authority, could put company officers in an impossible position.

Despite these challenges, over time, company officers adapted. The trials of 1862 helped volunteers to realize that their officer-election systems were not producing adequate combat leaders, and by 1863, many enlisted volunteers understood that competence, discipline, and composure were the most essential characteristics for successful officers, rather than status or popularity. This could be a begrudging sort of process, and the traditions of republican military service persisted. Volunteers retained an element of consent as a condition of their service, and they required their officers to explain how orders, particularly incomprehensible ones, would serve the military goal at hand. Officers and men alike eventually learned to discard some of the more egalitarian notions of the era, relying on a combination of coercion, persuasion, and displays of courage and competence to make the whole enterprise work.