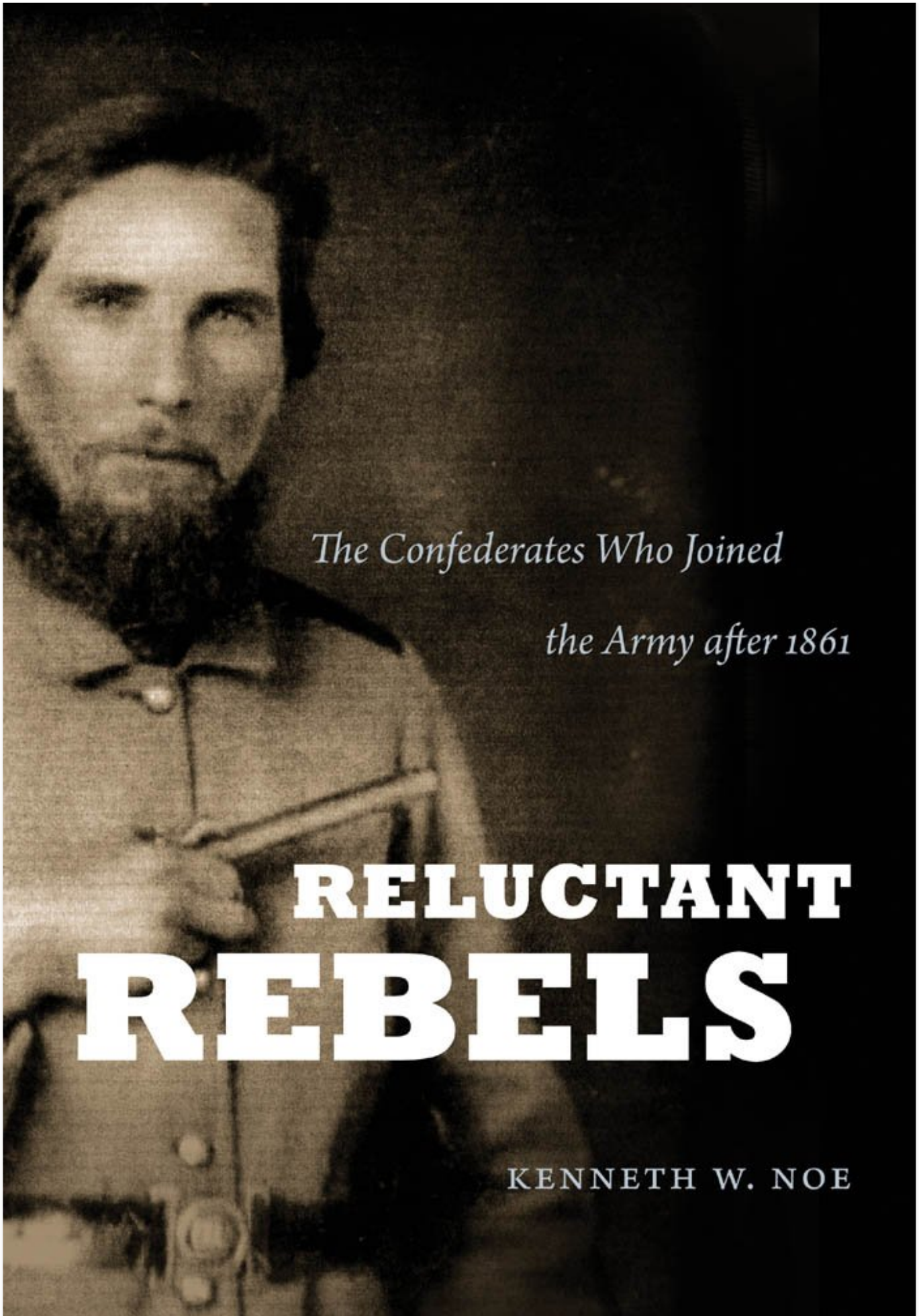


{essays in history}

The Annual Journal produced by the Corcoran Department of History at the
University of Virginia

Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1861



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RELUCTANT REBELS

KENNETH W. NOE

Volume 44 (2011)

Reviewed Work(s)

Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1861. By Kenneth W. Noe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Pp. 305. Cloth, \$35.00.

After Bell Wiley's pioneering works on the initial 1861 volunteers, historians have offered various interpretations of Civil War soldiers' reasons for enlisting. Early responses from Michael Barton and Gerald Linderman purported that nonideological reasons, such as duty, honor, manliness, and, above all, courage, motivated Confederate volunteers. However, more recent analyses by Reid Mitchell, James McPherson, Randall Jimerson, and other sociocultural historians have re-evaluated the original theses of Wiley, Barton, and Linderman.^[1] Rather than nonideological factors, Confederate soldiers actually enlisted based on the ideological foundations of slavery and white supremacy. Yet, absent from the lengthy historiography is an analysis of the late enlisters. Kenneth W. Noe's *Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1861*, fills a void in the existing scholarship. By exploring the motivations of Confederates who enlisted after 1861, Noe contends that the stereotypical description of the late enlisters, as hesitant nonslaveholding farmers, deserves re-evaluation (18).

Noe supports his argument with the personal writings – composed only during the war – from a random sample of 320 Confederates who enlisted after the initial excitement of 1861. Admittedly, privates dominate Noe's sample, because they were the majority rank in the Confederate Army. Therefore, in an attempt to balance his sample, he employs the papers of a small number of noncommissioned officers and even fewer commissioned officers. By concentrating primarily on privates, Noe hopes to present a representative sample of the Confederate Army and, therefore, an accurate illustration of the soldiers' reasons for fighting (14). To strengthen his analysis, Noe incorporates the

late enlisters' accounts into his themes, along with his reviews of secondary sources dedicated to similar topics.

Noe maintains that the existing historiography on Confederates that enlisted after 1861 is incomplete and fails to offer an inclusive study of the soldiers. To provide a more detailed picture, Noe organizes his book thematically, focusing on broad topics while weaving personal accounts from late enlisters throughout the text. He begins his examination by detailing the ideological reasons men joined, such as nationalism and the defense of slavery, as described by Mitchell and McPherson (27). Despite the assumption that late enlisters were nonslaveholding, Noe, referring to his sample, argues that slavery motivated at least one third of them, asserting that late enlisters "were just as determined to buy, rent, keep, and work slaves as the men who went before them" (60). Further confronting the historiography, Noe contends that the role of women, family, money, religion, and camaraderie influenced a man's decision to enlist. A combination of these factors stalled some soldiers' enlistment and persuaded others to join the Confederate Army after 1861.

After a discussion of the ideological and practical reasons for soldier enlistment after 1861, Noe focuses on what sustained them, such as religion and camaraderie (163). Once again drawing on his statistical sampling, Noe challenges the historiography and denies that late enlisters deserted more than the initial volunteers of 1861. Instead, similar to other occurrences of desertion, it was sporadic and event-driven (177). Following this detailed analysis of motivating and sustaining factors, Noe concludes that a variety of sources influenced the later enlisters and that they still "marched, fought, killed, and died for the Confederacy on dozens of battlefields," as their earlier counterparts had done (209).

Noe's integration of both primary and secondary sources results in a readable analysis of the Confederate soldiers who enlisted post-1861. By organizing his book thematically and including excerpts of the soldiers' wartime writings from his 320-person sample, Noe provides the reader and the historiography with a profound investigation into his subject. At times, however, Noe is unable to balance his analysis between the review of secondary sources and his selected primary sources. Instead, a significant part of his book reads like a literature review. It is not until the second half of the book that Noe begins to focus on the men from his

representative sample. At that point, Noe's use of his data does not allow for any definitive conclusions. He admits in the introduction that no sample can be truly random or representative; as a result, any conclusions are "only suggestive at best for the entire population" (13). Therefore, while his attempt to use a sample, similar to Joseph T. Glatthaar's *General Lee's Army*, is a valiant one, his conclusions based wholly on his data are weak.^[2] Yet, his incorporation of the late enlisters' personal writings into the text compensates for any confusing statistics. Consequently, Noe accomplishes his goal of supplying the historiography with an examination of Confederate later enlisters and their motivations.

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^[1] Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1982); McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Michael Barton, *Goodmen, the Character of Civil War Soldiers* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981); Gerald Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience Of Combat In The American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences* (New York: Viking, 1988); Randall C. Jimerson, *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought During the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

^[2] Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse* (New York: Free Press, 2008).



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