

# Appomattox Court House

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Appomattox Court House  
National Historical Park



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## Why Confederate Soldiers Fought

Confederate soldiers were primarily volunteers who enlisted for a variety of reasons. A crucial motivator for many Southern soldiers was the defense of home and family against the invading Northern armies, often characterized as “Vandals” or “Hessians.” Additionally, whether their families owned slaves or not, many believed that two fundamental aspects of Southern society, white liberty and black slavery, were under threat by a Federal government dominated by the North. Finally, a sense of personal honor and duty to their comrades, families, and communities, and to the new Confederacy, eventually propelled more than 800,000 men to enlist and persevere through four long years of Civil War; nearly 260,000 would not survive.

### Home and Family



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Southern woman holds soldier's image

“If I am killed tomorrow, it will be for Virginia, the land of my fathers, and not for the damned secession movement.”

– Major Charles Minor Blackford, 2nd Virginia Cavalry.

“Our homes our firesides our land and negroes and even the virtue of our fair ones is at stake.” – Lieutenant W. R. Redding, 13th Georgia Infantry

“Let me liberate my home from the varlet's tread, and then my country shall be freed from the fiendish vandals.” – Private James W. Smith, 37th Mississippi Infantry.

“If I fall it will be in a good Cause in the defence of my country defending my home and fireside.” – Private Andrew J. White, 30th Georgia Infantry

“When a Southron's home is threatened, the spirit of resistance is irrepressible. [We are] fighting for our firesides and property [to defend our homes from] vandal enemies and drive them from the soil polluted by their footsteps . . . I am determined to dispute every inch of soil with the Hessians e'er they shall invade the sunny South.” - Corporal George Knox Miller, Bowie's Company, Alabama Cavalry

### Liberty



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Soldier in the 11<sup>th</sup> Va. Infantry

“I feel that I am fighting for your liberty and the liberty and privileges of my little children.” – Private J.V. Fuller, 2nd Mississippi Infantry



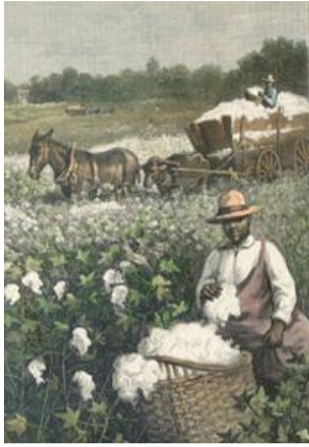
The Bonnie Blue Flag, an early symbol of secession.

“[I am willing to suffer] any and every hardship, rather than submit to Abolitionists who are invading our soil seeking to destroy that which our fore fathers gained for us 'liberty.'” – Lieutenant Robert G. Haile, 55th Virginia Infantry

“[I went to war so that] we may be permitted to have our own form of government and our own social institutions and regulate our own domestic affairs.” – Private Richard Henry Watkins, 3rd Virginia Cavalry

“Our men must prevail in combat, or lose their property, country, freedom, everything... On the other hand the enemy, in yielding the contest, may retire into their own country, and possess everything they enjoyed before the war began.” – Clerk John Jones, Confederate War Department

## Slavery



Slavery was the backbone of the Southern economy.

“Without slavery, there would not have been at the time any reason for the breakup [of] the old government, with it, there was an eternal strife dispute and quarrel between the North and South.” – *Lieutenant William E. Smith, 4th Georgia Infantry*

“This country without slave labor would be completely worthless. We can only live and exist by that species of labor; and hence I am willing to fight to the last.” – *Lieutenant William Nugent, 28th Mississippi Infantry*

“The vandals of the North are determined to destroy slavery.... We must all fight, and I choose to fight for southern rights and southern liberty” – *Private Lunsford Yandell, Jr., Kentucky Cavalry*

“If THEY could not endure a tax on tea because it violated a sacred principle, how could WE submit to be governed by those whose steady determination is to sacrifice our happiness, and even our lives, in the abolition of an institution guaranteed to us by the constitution of our fathers?” – *Private Ivy. W. Dugan, 48th Georgia Infantry*

“[I vow] to fight forever, rather than submit to freeing negroes among us.... We are fighting for rights and property bequeathed to us by our ancestors.” – *Captain Elias Davis, 8th Alabama Infantry*

“The Emancipation Proclamation is worth three-hundred thousand soldiers to our Government at least. It shows exactly what this war was brought about for and the intention of its damndable authors.” – *Sergeant Henry L. Stone, Kentucky Cavalry*

## Honor and Duty



Unidentified S. Carolina soldier

“It makes the blood boil in me when I think of an envading army being allowed to sleep two nights in Va without some attempt to drive them out.” – *Lieutenant James H. Langhorne, 4th Virginia Infantry*

“I expect to be a man of honor to my country at the risk of my life. I don't want to be a disgrace to myself nor my relations.” – *Private Eli Landers, 16th Georgia Infantry*

“On your account and that of my children I could not bear the idea of not being in this war. I would feel that my children would be ashamed of me when this war is spoken of & I should not have figured in it.” – *Captain James T. Armstrong, 6th Arkansas Infantry*

“Anyone who stays at home is no part of a man.” – *Private William N. Adams, 4th North Carolina Infantry*

“I would be disgraced if I staid at home, and unworthy of my revolutionary ancestor.... There is no one bearing my name left to fight for our freedom. The honor of our family is involved.... A man who will not offer up his life does dishonor to his wife and children.” – *Private Samuel D. Sanders, 6th South Carolina Infantry*

“It shall never be said that Jerry was a coward and wood not fight for his country.” – *Private Jeremiah Tate, 5th Alabama Infantry*

## The Draft

While most Confederate soldiers were volunteers, representing all social classes, more than ten percent were conscripts, men drafted into military service against their will. The Confederate Congress enacted the first draft in American history in April of 1862. Initially, the law called for all able-bodied men between 18 and 35; by 1864 boys as young as 17 and men up to 50 years old were required to serve. Exemptions were available for government workers, those employed in vital war related industries, and for owners of twenty or more slaves. These exemptions created resentment among the lower classes, particularly poor farmers with large families, who increasingly felt that it had become a “rich man's war and a poor man's fight.”

“They may talk of liberty and they may talk of me dying in war but I want to live with my family and live in peace...if this is independence don't want it. I had rather take bondage.” – *Private William Ross Stilwell, 53rd Georgia Infantry*



Unidentified Confederate

“I could be at home if it warent for a few big rulers who I cannot help but blame for it.... These big fighting men cant be got out to fight as easy as to make speeches.... They lay at home feesting on the good things of the land while we poor soldiers are foured away from home.” – *Private John W. Reese, 57th North Carolina Infantry*