

“We Have No Newspapers . . . Dull! Dull!”: Mass Media Dependency During the American Civil War

BETTY HOUCHIN WINFIELD¹
University of Missouri, USA

CHAD PAINTER
University of Dayton, USA

This study ties contemporary media dependency theory with the historical reliance on mass media during the American Civil War. Researchers used a thematic textual analysis of references to newspapers and magazines in personal correspondence found in 32 published collections of approximately 1,000 soldiers’ letters. Consistent with media dependency research, soldiers needed media information for understanding of self in the horrific world they were living in; for orientation of actions in the battles (or anticipated behavior for battles expected); and for entertainment relief as escapism. Researchers found four additional media dependency components: a validation of the experience; reliance for a better explanation than what an individual correspondent could express; a check on accuracy about the coverage due to what the soldier witnessed or thought; and an emotional longing for local news about family and friends.

Keywords: media dependency, American Civil War, newspapers, media history, textual analysis

This interdependency study ties contemporary media dependency theory with the historical reliance on mass media during the American Civil War era (1861–1865). As historical theory building based on previous media dependency studies, the aim is to understand why and how soldiers relied on mass media when the Civil War distanced combatants from familiar surroundings and put them in a bloody war. In personal letters, both Northern and Southern soldiers referred to newspapers and magazines. The purpose here is not to seek mere mentions of the war in print media but to see how soldiers relied on mass media and to understand those wartime conditions. The goal is to add to previous media dependency findings and seek any new media dependency themes during the American Civil War. This research will show four new media dependency themes: a validation of the experience; reliance for a better explanation than what an

Betty Houchin Winfield: BHW3602@aol.com

Chad Painter: cpainter@udayton.edu

Date submitted: 2022-04-05

¹ We wish to acknowledge the dozens of Missouri School of Journalism undergraduates who helped us locate Civil War letters.

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individual correspondent could express; a check for agreement or lack of it; and support for the emotional longing for home.

The Civil War era fits well in a historical exploration of 19th-century letters and newspapers (Dicken Garcia, 1991; Zboray & Zboray, 1997). The years 1861–1865 had a reading and letter-writing public due to the influence of family, church, schools and academies, associations and institutes, private and public libraries (Zboray, 1993), and high literacy rates with nearly 90% literacy among White men (Klein & Shammass, 2020). Indeed, Captain William Vermilion of Iowa wrote to his wife on June 23, 1865: “It will not do for me to resign and leave my men just at this time when they need my services worse than they ever have. No other man knows as much about books and papers as I do” (Elder, 2003, p. 322).

The United States in the 19th century had a restless and constantly moving population that relied on letters to maintain long-distance relationships (Zboray, 1993). Such correspondence as well as local newspaper publications became deputy communities outside of the usual geographical sites with familiar references to hometown places, updates, and news coverage. When the Civil War distanced soldiers from their usual geographical surroundings, personal letters and familiar hometown newspapers became essential sources of information. Their letters became insightful primary sources for what soldiers thought about the war (Manning, 2007).

At the same time, the 19th-century public had a strong news consciousness, a desire to be informed, as an almost fundamental requirement of citizenship (Zboray, 1993). In fact, Vermilion presented this imagined scene in letter to his wife (March 24, 1863):

I sit sometimes, and shut my eyes and imagine I am there, and my love is sitting near me, or lying in the lounge, and the fire is burning cheerfully, and the hearth is swept clean and bright and the Post and Tribune are lying on the round table at my side. (Elder, 2003, p. 73)

The newspaper choices were massive. The 1860 Census reported the aggregate number of papers and periodicals of every class as being 4,051, an increase of more than 60% since 1850, with an annual circulation of almost a million copies, a more than 100% increase in 10 years (Kennedy, 1862). The public read circulating magazines and local newspapers as well as small-town weeklies and had choices of more than 400 daily newspapers (Lee, 1937/1973). Almost all communities had at least two newspapers, and many had three or more; New York had 11 dailies, while Philadelphia, Chicago, and St. Louis each had more than 10 (Risley, 2012).

The largest Northern daily newspaper, *The New York Herald* relied on up to 60 war correspondents and had a daily circulation of 77,000; and the weekly *New York Tribune* with its multi-correspondents had a weekly circulation of 200,000 (Endres, 1998). People sought information, and, especially under crisis conditions, this led to a great dependence on news. Constant news was crucial and had an effect (Klein & Shammass, 2020). Soldier morale was related to reading newspapers (McPherson, 2007). As it was a civil war, both sides spoke and read the same language; news accounts could alert an enemy, place troops in danger, be wrong, and hurt morale due to battle losses.

Repeated press extras following major events led to circulation growth of up to four million by 1870. As Lee (1937/1973) recounted about 1861, "Never did an army before possess so much of cultivated intellect or demand such contributions for its mental food as that now marshaled in its country's defense" (p. 233). Such demand indicated great media dependency on the part of soldiers and the civilian populations alike.

The Civil War reshaped American newspapers. More news space was given to covering the war than to any other single subject in American history (Dicken-Garcia, 1989). Newspapers mentioned the war on 80% of their pages and devoted nearly 40% of page space to war-related content (Klein & Shammass, 2020). The Civil War impacted all aspects of journalism—reporting, editing, circulation, printing, advertising, and visuals—though many of those changes began before the war (Dicken-Garcia, 1989; Risley, 2012; Sloan & Startt, 1999). New standards were developed for news writing, such as the inverted pyramid, bylines, and dependence on Associated Press reporting, and for news style, such as the summary lead, direct quotations, and interviews (Bulla & Borchard, 2010; Dicken-Garcia, 1989; Risley, 2001, 2012). Readers demanded facts immediately, especially wartime coverage (Sloan & Startt, 1999), which led to an increasing emphasis on events narrated clearly and concisely and a corresponding de-emphasis on opinion and comment (Dicken-Garcia, 1989; Risley, 2001, 2012). Reporters not only related what happened but also captured the trauma of events and a sense of the battles, and they incorporated the personalities of generals (Folkerts, Teeter, & Caudill, 2009; Sloan & Startt, 1999).

Media Dependency

Media dependence is a *need*, which distinguishes it from uses and gratifications theory, based on the premise that people deliberately use media for particular purposes; they have an active, not passive, role in consuming media to fulfill specific wants or motives (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015). Media dependency proposes an integral relationship among audiences, media, and the larger social system. It also "takes into account the human motivations that surround media usage and affect the process of understanding" (Grant, 1996, p. 199). When traditional norms and roles are in a state of flux, the need is particularly great because the media can reduce ambiguity (Merskin, 1999). People turn to mass media for social and emotional support, specifically under various conditions such as when they are distanced from the comforting mantle of family, church, and neighborhood (Ball-Rokeach, 1998).

The need for media rises during crises such as war. When social change and conflict are especially high, established institutions, beliefs, and practices become challenged and force an individual to reevaluate and make new choices, thereby increasing dependence on mass media. Unlike during more stable times when mass media dependency might be low, the reliance on the media for information becomes vital and increases during war crises. The fantasy escape value of media rises dramatically; consequently, there is an increased need for entertainment.

The more dependent individuals are on mass media for fulfilling their needs, the more important the media will be to those persons. Media dependence accordingly correlates with the significance and influence of the media even though people might use mass media differently, even selectively, and can be affected differently. Individual and demographic factors such as attitudes, values, and interests influence media dependency—not just the necessity for general information (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989).

Moreover, media dependency indicates a complex relationship and may be shaped by the culture, various social conditions, and the availability of non-media alternatives. The more alternatives an individual has for meeting information requirements, the less dependent the individual might become on the established mass media. During the American Civil War, the few communication alternatives were limited to oral speech and personal letters, thus necessitating a continued reliance on existing newspapers and magazines.

The Civil War and Media Dependency

As with previous populations studied (e.g., Jang & Baek, 2019; Morton & Duck, 2000), soldiers required mass media information for an understanding of the self in the horrific world they now experienced. They also needed such media for orientation of action toward the battles they faced or for anticipated behavior for the battles expected. Such need for media would provide entertainment as a means of relief or escapism (Loges, 1994; Ng, Chan, Balwicki, Huxley, & Chiu, 2019). Yet, it is possible that media dependence also could motivate problem solving and emotional longing for connections to home.

This study acknowledges the deprivation explanation and the influence of a situation on an individual's experiences and adaptation to horrific situations. The stress of the 1861–1865 wartime environments can indicate soldiers' media needs, much like Vandebosch's (2000) "captive audience" prisoners who maintained their "former viewing, reading, and listening patterns . . . and the personal needs and media possibilities in their new environment" (p. 531). The militia in the Civil War already had mass media reading patterns; and now in a wartime environment of soldiering, they also had possible new media needs.

The Historical Study on Civil War Media Dependency

This historical approach combines the primary source of personal letters with historical context and media dependency theory. To understand how Civil War soldiers depended on the media, researchers conducted a thematic textual analysis of letter writers' references to newspapers and magazines. While other scholars (e.g., Manning, 2007; Risley, 2005) relied on soldiers' letters, this study is unique because it traces soldiers' media dependence found in their letters. As "bottom-up" research (Stone, 1997), the text found in private correspondence, researchers here sought specific textual passages as response patterns (Zboray & Zboray, 1997); those patterns became themes for diverse types of media reliance. Union and Confederate writers had varied levels of literacy, education, and background, and they represented all military ranks. The researchers noted when and how soldiers mentioned the press (Ryan, 1996) in answering how the letters of Civil War participants indicate a dependence on the press of the day.

The goal was an understanding of how soldiers acted when using and depending on mass media during the Civil War era and, through media, the meaning that could be determined by that use. Researchers distinguished between a mere mention of a newspaper or magazine and some element of dependence by showing a purpose, need, habit, craving, or reliance on newspapers and magazines.

The analysis began with contemporary media dependency theory with categories taken from Ball-Rokeach (1998) and DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) for likenesses and differences for new repeated patterns. The goal was to understand the repeated patterns of media dependency from soldiers'

media references in the almost 1,000 letters found in 32 published collections from both Confederate and Union soldiers.

This study is a function of the complex relationships between the media, the audience, and society as exemplified by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976). By studying repeated patterns, the researchers found themes that indicated that the letters had become surrogates for soldiers who sought information and social support, vital for the complex media dependency argument.

To learn more about those complex relationships, researchers selected repeated media dependency themes found in DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach's (1989) research: understanding by knowledge, orientation for action or reaction, and entertainment for fantasy and escapism. In this study, the researchers observed Civil War soldiers' dependence on understanding the larger war or particular campaigns or battles.

Additionally, the previous theme of media dependency for orientation was found, as a reaction about the war and for an individual's future action or collective reaction on how to manage demanding situations in strange surroundings. Similar to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach's (1989) findings, there was also the fantasy escape theme or entertainment. The Civil War print media gave soldiers a way to relax alone or served as a type of catharsis to what had happened. The researchers sought reinforcement of those themes previously found in contemporary media dependency studies as well as any new components of media dependency.

New Media Dependency Components

This study found four new media dependency components, adding to previous scholarship: a validation of the experience; a reliance for a better explanation than what an individual correspondent could provide; a check on the coverage for agreement or disagreement because of what the soldier witnessed or thought; and an emotional longing for news about soldiers' locale, family, and friends.

As a validation theme, soldiers referred to specific news coverage as confirming what had been experienced. Captain William G. Morris of North Carolina wrote to his family (September 8, 1862) this validation: "You may Believe almost anything you see in the Papers about our fights because they Cannot make it much worse than it really is on the Enemy, they are Badly whipped [*sic*]" (Watford, 2003, p. 63).

The soldiers' letters included confirmation statements such as "what you will see," "you will get," and "watch for" to authenticate the event. Moreover, the speed of the newspaper account became juxtaposed with a letter's arrival time and thereby enhanced the validation of coverage. For instance, Captain Jacob Ritner confirmed to his wife Emeline (March 30, 1863), "It is not worth while [*sic*] for me to try to tell you any war news; you will hear it all by the papers before a letter could get there. We look to them for the news ourselves" (Larimer, 2000, p. 143).

In another instance, Corporal Charles Cort of the Illinois Infantry Regiment wrote in 1864 of waiting to see what the newspaper story would add and sought to validate the coverage:

I will leave off this very imperfect account and wait untill [*sic*] I see the newspaper stories. If you get any general account of it in the paper, I would like you to send it to me. The report is that we are to leave here in three days in what direction is uncertain. (Tomlinson, 1962, p. 156)

Such a validation of coverage resulted in a reliance on a specific newspaper for an account of an event. The writer was prohibited from giving timely updates due to battle censorship. As the war was winding down, Yankee captain Ritner asked of his Iowan wife Emeline (June 8, 1964), "I want you to take the *Hawkeye* while this campaign lasts. I can tell you but very little in my letters" (Larimer, 2000, p. 291).

There also was a reliance on the media for a better explanation, regardless of the soldier's rank and previous education. Officers, captains, and privates alike refer to newspapers' superior detailed descriptions. Rebel captain Alfred Belo wrote in 1861, "If I have omitted any items of news or any importance, I suppose you will see it in the next *Sentinel*" (Watford, 2003, p. 12).

In fact, some letter writers cited newspapers as a superior news source. North Carolinian private John A. Jackson wrote his sister Martha (May 9, 1863), "So I shal [*sic*] say no more about the battle for some body [*sic*] else can give a better description than I can and that will be put in the papers for every body [*sic*] to read" (Watford, 2003, p. 110).

Several reasons contributed to the reliance on newspapers to provide a better account. Newspapers often reached the home front before the soldiers' letters. The telegraph increased the speed of news as did war correspondents' desire to beat the competition (Risley, 2012). Confederate Tally Simpson, son of a South Carolina senator, told his sister Anna that he had "no news to write except what you have already found through the papers" (Everson & Simpson, 1994, p. 80). After the 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg, Simpson also wrote his aunt Caroline Miller, "An account of it you have read in the papers by this time, and it will be useless for me to attempt to add anything of interest" (p. 165).

Soldiers consistently urged their families to follow newspaper accounts also because of war correspondents' greater access. Lawyer turned Confederate soldier David Pierson wrote his father William (August 15, 1861), "You will see a complete description of the fight in the papers, and I expect more correct than what I write since theirs is from headquarters and mine from camp reports" (Cutrer & Parrish, 1997, p. 34). To alert his family of his unit's location, Jacob Ritner urged his wife, "If you watch the papers for Osterhaus' Division you will learn our whereabouts sooner than from my letters" (Larimer, 2000, p. 212).

In recounting events, soldiers also relied on newspaper coverage as being definitive and regular. Major William Watson, a surgeon in the Army of the Potomac, wrote (December 16, 1862) after the Second Battle of Bull Run that newspapers would supply a better and more definite account of the series of battles than he would be able to (Fatout, 1961). The previous year, during the First Battle of Bull Run at Manassas Junction, Confederate officer David Pierson wrote his father (August 15, 1861), "You can see full particulars of the battle in the papers before this will reach you and more correct than I can possibly give you, as I can only tell you what our Regt did" (Cutrer & Parrish, 1997, p. 42).

In fact, many Union soldiers cited accurate newspaper accounts of battlefield skirmishes. Captain William Vermilion, in a letter to his wife Mary, wrote (May 21, 1864), "If you will look in the Missouri Democrat of last week you will see what the boys say is a good description of the fight at Marks Mills" (Elder, 2003, p. 277).

Soldiers referred to stories lauding their good efforts. John Brobst, a Wisconsin regular, wrote to his friend (and future wife) Mary Englesby (May 22, 1864), "General Woods has issued an order to compliment our regt. for its good conduct on the battlefield. It was a good one. Perhaps you will see it in some of the papers soon" (Roth, 1960, p. 61).

War correspondents, often closer to the heart of the battle, gave the bigger picture of the happenings more freely than combatants. Al Pierson, writing home, told his father William (July 11, 1862), "You will get more particulars concerning the battles before Richmond from the papers than I am able to give" (Cutrer & Parrish, 1997, p. 102). Even high-ranking officers often could not get full accounts of the war, as evidenced by Colonel Hans Christian Heg's 1862 letter to his wife Gunild. After the Second Battle of Bull Run, he wrote, "I find that the 1st, 10th, 21st and 24th Wis Regiments were all in the fight on the 8th and that they were mostly all badly cut up. The Papers will tell you more about it than I can" (Blegan, 1936, p. 147).

Such accurate knowledge could be dangerous, especially concerning planned troop maneuvers. Another media dependency theme was agreement or disagreement of the coverage. Such accuracy was often blamed for a defeat, such as the Union's loss at Bull Run. Vermont resident William Young Ripley, Sr. wrote his son William Jr. (July 19, 1861):

And there is one other thing that they ought to do, and must do—if they expect any movement, without having the enemy fully advised of their plans—and that is to hang every newspaper reporter, and editor, that they find within ten miles of Washington or any military post. (Marshall, 1999, p. 40)

The reporting of military movements could result in a court martial. Information about troop movements was not to be telegraphed without the sanction of the major general in command. In fact, almost every Northern military department suppressed at least one newspaper or had its correspondent or editor arrested (Endres, 1998). For instance, Dr. Franklin Dyer recorded in April 1865, "Denyse, correspondent for the New York Herald, was sentenced by court-martial to hard labor on the public works for sending such an article for publication" (Chesson, 2003, p. 71).

Nevertheless, even though combatants depended on newspaper coverage for knowledge and orientation, as well as validation and agreement, soldiers added their own contributions. After the Battle of Gettysburg, Second Lieutenant Leonides L. Polk updated his wife Pamela in North Carolina (August 6, 1863):

So we go. Yankee papers say that N.C. is back in the Union and quote Holden as the authority. The militia of this place is ordered out & are on duty. I saw a man today who was taken with our sick in Penn. He brought me a full list of all of them, and I sent it to the Daily Progression in Raleigh & requested the Observer copy it. (Watford, 2003, p. 129)

Regardless of rank, soldiers were paid by column inch as correspondent; they then sought to obtain a copy of the resulting newspaper. General Voris wrote of contributing in October 1863, "I announced an order this morning giving my views of the duties of soldiers . . . a copy with it I sent to the Herald for publication. If it is published you can get a copy of the paper for preservation" (Mushkat, 2002, p. 140). As another example, Colonel Hans Christian Heg wrote to his wife (December 28, 1862), "I have given an account of our exploit, in capturing the Cassion, to the Governor, and Fleischer, so you will see the account of it in the papers soon" (Blegan, 1936, p. 162). Such effort, however, was time consuming. Madison Bowler wrote his Minnesota wife Lizzie (December 18, 1861), "I have not written a letter to any Newspaper since I left Minn. It is too much work for little pay" (Foroughi, 2008, p. 40).

For accuracy, a particular soldier was sometimes appointed to be the correspondent. Such was the case of Harvey Reid, a former teacher from Racine, Wisconsin. He wrote his family in 1862, "Before leaving Cincinnati, Captain Williamson had asked me to become a Company correspondent to the Advocate. Thinking it might be an advantage to me, I consented" (Bryne, 1965, p. 4).

Such efforts were appreciated. Theodore Upson wrote at the end of the war:

Colonel Grimes never got tired of talking about our Army, and the City papers still print a good deal in the way of descriptions of the different Regiments and especially those of our Corps. I gave one paper an account of our battle at Griswoldsville, and they printed it in full. They are glad to have funny anecdotes and I have told several to reporters. (Winther, 1958, p. 178)

A sub-theme was the repeated pattern of soldiers' strong disagreement with coverage. Often, there were evaluative general statements as well as bits of evidence to prove fraudulent accounts. In 1862, during the Battle of Shiloh, Lieutenant Colonel Alan Voris wrote of the false account, "I see by the Cincinnati Commercial that I got 14 bullet holes in my overcoat cape, or that it had lots of bullet holes in it. 14 bullet holes, enough to make a strainer of it" (Mushkat, 2002, p. 49).

Soldiers highlighted the many mistakes and lies in the coverage, especially when skirmishes and battles were lost. Following the occupation of Savannah, Captain Jacob Ritner wrote his wife on Christmas 1864, "You need not believe anything you see from southern papers about the opposition we met on the way here" (Larimer, 2000, p. 398). Another example is South Carolinian volunteer Tally Simpson's letter to his sister Anna (August 11, 1865), "I see in one of the Columbia papers that there are four or five southerners there. This is emphatically a mistake. The only force we have there is one I mentioned above, and they go and return from Fairfax C.H. every day" (Everson & Simpson, 1994, p. 53). Similarly, Confederate Second Lieutenant Samuel Burney wrote to his wife Elizabeth about false accounts (December 15, 1861), "I understand the Ga. papers are full of accounts of a great fight on the Peninsula. There is no truth in it, but I guess you will all be apprehensive till you hear the denial of it" (Turner, 2002, p. 81).

Newspapers often attempted to improve morale by downplaying a failure and enthusiastically proclaiming victories, regardless of what happened. At the same time, reporting was especially difficult for Southern correspondents' survival as they tried to obtain food and horses. Both Southern and Northern

newspaper correspondents faced threats to suppress any newspaper that published anything derogatory concerning the generals' leadership (Trahan, 1998).

Moreover, both Southern and Northern newspapers were disingenuous. Early in the war, when the Union Army was in trouble, General Alvin Voris complained about the misleading coverage from Maryland:

The papers give a very imperfect idea of the war. Much of the published matter is utterly untruthful, more near fiction, being the visionary dreams of paid letter writers, and with the semi-official telegraphic war news is the fulsome praise . . . An inevitable defeat is made a masterly strategic movement. A scandalous preconcerted plan of the Gen commanding. Victories are highly puffed. Defeats are immense amount of ingenuity exerted to make victories on paper. (Mushkat, 2002, p. 140)

Voris continued to express his skepticism in 1864: "Our army is too light to do anything more than threaten their weak points and destroy their lines of communication. This the papers say has been effectually done, but I don't think so" (Mushkat, 2002, p. 174).

Other soldiers also complained about the Northern newspapers' falsehoods. Major Henry Livermore Abbott wrote his father (November 7, 1861): "In a word, you had better disbelieve all the stories & all the puffs in the papers, except those which have the sanction of this regt., & then you will be safe" (Scott, 1991, p. 74). Captain Ritner disagreed with newspaper accounts of General Sherman's planned actions: "I see the Northern papers say that Sherman is in no hurry to take the place but is going to take his own time for it. This is all bosh" (Larimer, 2000, p. 328).

The disagreements were not just about lying but also about the extent of unrecognized military failure. In an account to his father, William Watson wrote of the northern Virginia advance (October 30, 1864):

The papers state the 2nd and 5th Corps merely went on a reconnaissance and, succeeding in developing the strength of the enemy, retired to their old positions. To tell the truth, Pa, this is not so—for we advanced with the intention and almost certainly of turning the enemy's right flank, capturing the south side railroad, Petersburg and probably Richmond, in all of which we failed. This of course will not be published—nevertheless it is true. (Fatout, 1961, p. 88)

Overall, press evaluations as opinions came in for great criticism. Daniel Holt, a surgeon in the Army of the Potomac, wrote his wife (December 4, 1863):

I tell you how it is, Louisa, if Meade ever did a noble act in his life, it was when he concluded *not* to fight Lee in his strong hold upon the banks of Mine Run at a temperature of the weather far, far below freezing. Newspapers blame him and call him coward for not doing so; but let their editors be with me to have seen and felt what I saw and felt upon that occasion, and instead of taunts and ridicules, they would bestow words of commendation. (Greiner, Coryell, & Smither, 1994, p. 160)

Soldiers corrected newspaper accounts. Tally Simpson, a Confederate soldier from South Carolina, told his brother Richard (August 7, 1861):

I suppose by this time, having consulted all the papers concerning the celebrated battle of Bull's Run [*sic*], you are well posted in all the particulars of the fight. But knowing that you have formed your ideas of the battle ground by the descriptions in the papers, I inclose [*sic*] a drawing of the positions of both parties during the memorable conflict. The arrow points north. By examining the paper, you can easily obtain a pretty correct idea of the positions of the parties when the battles began on Thursday and when [it was renewed] on Sunday. (Everson & Simpson, 1994, p. 43)

Recognizing that news coverage was dangerous, soldiers wanted press censorship. Andrew Evans received a letter from his son Sam, a Union soldier from Ohio, who wrote (June 11, 1864):

I would Love to see news papers [*sic*] that circulate that kind of Lies Suppressed. News papers [*sic*] talk of the "freedom of the Press" and all that kind of stuff. We would have had better Success in subduing this Rebellion if 49/50 of the papers had been suppressed in the beginning [and] the army "correspondents" been required to take a musket instead [of] the pen. (Engs & Brooks, 2007, p. 263)

Such threats often resulted in mob action against newspapers (Trahan, 1998).

Often, a soldier's response was a call for violence. Major William Watson, a doctor stationed with the 105th Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers, wrote after the Bloody Manassas Junction fight (November 1, 1862): "I received the Bedford Gazette you sent. It is a vile sheet. One of the Boys read it and remarked he would like to hang the editor" (Fatout, 1961, p. 26).

As a brutal reaction, North Carolinian private Jacob H. Hanes wrote his brother about an attack on an editor's office (September 16, 1863):

I was verry [*sic*] much pleased to hear of the soldiers making a raid upon old Holden's office. It undoubtedly would have been the primary step towards promoting the honor of N.C. had they pitched old Holden into the streets and broke his neck instead of his press. The Raleigh Standard has a bad effect upon the ignorant class of people who are not able to comprehend its design. It should not be allowed to be sent to the army. (Watford, 2003, p. 133)

Amid lies, puffery, and newspaper suppression, soldiers sought accurate information for their own survival, regardless of whether the newspaper was from the Union or the Confederacy. Amazingly enough, soldiers willingly traded newspapers across enemy lines for battle accounts about the other side. The first instance found in this analysis was an 1862 account written by Second Lieutenant Samuel Burney to his wife Elizabeth. Burney complains, "We both saw a gentleman of our side exchange a paper with one of the scoundrels for a New York Herald. At that point on the lines the pickets do not shoot at each other" (Turner, 2002, p. 184). He mentioned four more exchanges in 1863 and 1864.

This sharing of newspapers between the two sides was astonishing. General Alvin Voris wrote in 1863 as if the exchanges were normal: "We sent sugar and old newspapers to them; they tobacco and newspapers to us" (Mushkat, 2002, p. 125). Another letter account from North Carolinian private John Fuller Coghill to his sister Mildred (September 27, 1863) mentioned almost normal contacts following the Battle of Chickamauga: "While we are on picket we would talk with the Yankees and would swap news papers [*sic*] and we would go down to the river to wash our face and hands" (Watford, 2003, p. 34).

Of course, both sides wanted the varied accounts of battles. Some places were almost devoid of news. Many Southerners lost newsprint and paper imports immediately. General Voris wrote his wife Lydia in March 1862: "Newspapers are rarely seen from the south. In fact paper has become almost obsolete here" (Mushkat, 2002, p. 34). Ohioan Isaac Jackson wrote his brother Moses and sister Phoebe in 1863: "The Rebs were very low in spirits—they could not entirely hide it. I read one of their papers printed on the 3rd. It was printed on wallpaper, on the white side" (Jackson, 1960, p. 111).

Waving a newspaper was the common signal for a newspaper exchange. Harvey Reid wrote his family in 1864:

Just as we rode up to our picked post one of the boys was waving a newspaper in his hand. Soon the signal was answered from the log house, and three rebs. started down the hill with papers in their hands. Three of our boys also started with their papers and each one also carried a bag of coffee. They met just beyond the creek and talked half an hour. Indeed, we left before all the boys got back. The papers they got were not very valuable for news, being religious papers at least a month old. (Bryne, 1965, p. 159)

Another media dependency theme was soldiers' emotional longing for news about the familiar: home, family, and friends. As homesickness increased, hometown newspapers provided an identifiable community. For example, toward the end of the war, Captain Ritner highlighted his angst during the Louisiana campaign (March 14, 1865):

We have got no mail yet, but a boat came up this evening and brought some northern papers—some as late as March 6th. I have not had time to read them much yet. But it seems like getting into a civilized country again, to be where we can see a New York paper. You have no idea how lonesome and lost one feels to be a month or six weeks in these woods and swamps, without hearing anything from America!" (Larimer, 2000, p. 429)

Throughout the Civil War, soldiers wrote about how newspapers fulfilled an emotional need with news from home. Second Lieutenant Samuel Burney assured his wife Elizabeth (November 5, 1861) that he "received a letter from Bro. John & a package of papers from Pa with your letter last night. Nothing is so encouraging to the soldier as to know that he is remembered at home" (Turner, 2002, p. 53). Indeed, as McPherson (2007) argued, the local newspapers kept up military morale with hometown news.

Homesickness was a common response. Captain August Horstmann wrote his parents (December 22, 1863), "Is the *Criminal-Zeitung* still arriving regularly? Friends, home becomes more precious from afar"

(Kamphoefner & Helbich, 2006, p. 127). Similarly, Sam Evans wrote to his father Andrew (April 19, 1863), expressing that he "received the Bee you sent me and felt quite at home on reading it" (Engs & Brooks, 2007, p. 130).

Previous Media Dependency Themes

The themes from previous contemporary media dependency studies were constantly found. Soldiers mentioned seeking accurate information and a better understanding (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989), especially when no newspapers were available. Captain William Vermillion wrote his Iowan wife Mary in January 1863: "I have not seen any papers this week and all I know is hearsay. I can't wait, it seems to me, for news" (Elder, 2003, p. 42). General Alvin Voris wrote his wife in June 1862:

We are so cut off from news that I do not now know what is going on. I have not had a letter from you since May 11th, have seen only two newspapers later than May 24. We hear idle rumors about victories and defeats & etc., etc., but have no reliable information. (Mushkat, 2002, p. 61)

Voris, who survived the Battle of Fredericksburg, wrote his wife in February 1863: "Newspapers, the light and luxury of modern times, I might say almost a necessity to our existence, have been cut off from the 30th of Dec. last to 30th Jany" (Mushkat, 2002, p. 104). Near the war's end, he wrote in 1864: "We have the Eastern papers of the 13th, and frightful indeed are they with the horrid recitals of war" (Mushkat, 2002, p. 174).

DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) wrote that media dependency also related to orientation for individual action and specific behavior. Cornelia Hancock, a nurse, was primarily in Washington, DC, after her physician brother-in-law asked her to assist in caring for the Gettysburg wounded. In 1864, she indicated how newspapers determined her action:

I returned to Philadelphia, but remained only a short time, for going on an errand to 7th & Arch one day, I heard the newspaper boys crying, "The battle of the Wilderness" and "General Hays killed." I did not finish my errand, and went home and told Ellen I was going to Washington that night and did go, to find Washington in the same suspense and uncertainty that prevailed in Philadelphia after the battle of Gettysburg. (Jaquette, 1937, p. 89)

Orientation leading to action might bring a desired result. Confederate Joseph Hopkins Twitchell wrote his father (June 9, 1861):

We have procured a grant of 100 daily papers for each regiment—which argues that the several proprietors regard themselves as beholden to the warmakers. I hope that gift will tend to make the men intelligent and appreciative of the causes of war. (Messent & Courtney, 2006, p. 30)

Orientation related to expected actions. Officer Samuel Burney of the Army of Northern Virginia wrote his wife (November 7, 1861): "I suppose you read the papers close to see if there is anything about a fight or probability of a fight in and near Yorktown. My opinion is we will have no fight on this peninsula until next spring" (Turner, 2002, p. 56). Burney's optimism continued the next winter; in his February 6 letter, he wrote, "I think from what I read in the papers that England and France will intervene and raise the blockade in a very short while" (Turner, 2002, p. 116). By war's end (July 24, 1864), Burney was writing,

I can see from the papers that one hundred men have gone from old Morgan to meet the enemy at Atlanta. This is the way to defeat Sherman, and if every county will do as well, he will be defeated. (Turner, 2002, p. 277)

Another Southern officer, Tally Simpson, wrote his sister (April 5, 1863) about news orientation based on a feature about Major General McLaws:

The other day I sent you a copy of the "Illustrated News" which contains a photograph of our worthy major general, McLaws, together with a short sketch of his life since he became a military man. McLaws' Division gets the credit of taking Maryland Heights. This is all very correct. But Kershaw's Brig should have more credit for the part it acted. (Everson & Simpson, 1994, p. 209)

Confederate Twitchell, who oversaw the camp planning, wrote his father (May 26, 1861) about the importance of printed tracts as orientation for future actions:

I had made up my mind not to let Sunday slip by unnoticed. So, I took care yesterday to furnish myself with a supply of soldier tracts and publications of all sorts and thus armed I spent several hours in distributing them among the men, seasoning the operation by such conversation or admonition as chance suggested or allowed. (Messent & Courtney, 2006, p. 28)

Corporal Sanford Branch of Savannah, who was captured in 1863, wrote his mother in September about the newspapers giving him hope: "I am in hopes of geting [sic] exchanged or paroled soon, the Yankee papers speak of a new cartel having been agreed upon. I hope it may be so for am tired of this country" (Joslyn, 1996, p. 173).

Civil War combatants also wrote of the fantasy and entertainment media dependency components, similar to what DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) found. For example, North Carolinian captain James A. Graham explained to his mother (December 30, 1864), "If we are deprived of the mail, we will fare but poorly in camp as we have very little pleasure now except from the letters & papers we get" (Watford, 2003, p. 190).

General Alvin C. Voris complained of the loss of newspapers to his wife in February 1862: "We have no newspapers—dull! dull! Vacant day . . . I saw a beacon a day or two since 23rd of Jan. and once a while I got a Herald but we are now beyond the post office" (Mushkat, 2002, p. 49).

A North Carolinian chaplain wrote of the soldiers' pleasure with free distributed newspapers, even religious ones. Reverend Jeffrey H. Robbins wrote the editor of *North Carolina Presbyterian* (March 24, 1863):

For some time I intended to drop you a line in acknowledging the receipt of a bundle of your paper, which regularly makes visits to my regiment. It is a very welcome comer, and I take pleasure in distributing it among the soldiers who are always glad to receive it, especially those of your church. For your paper is the only public representation that your church has in the brigade. (Watford, 2003, p. 153)

Soldiers expressed the "play" or escape entertainment theme in distinct ways. One was the use of magazines' female visual plates to decorate camp walls. The date, sender, and recipient are unknown on a letter stating,

What are most sought after for this purpose are the colored fashion plates in the ladies' magazines. As hardly any women are ever seen, the images of attractive women are put where the boys can feast their eyes on them. (Murphy, 1993, p. 58)

Newspapers and especially magazines were mainly used to pass away the boring uneventful days of camp in between marches and battles. Ohioan Isaac Jackson wrote home twice to express his enjoyment of the printed materials people sent. In a letter to his brother Ethan and sister-in-law Mary (March 4, 1863), he was thankful for an issue of *Harper's Weekly*: "I had got very hungry for something to read as well as for something to eat. You must not forget to send us reading matter, for we need it very much" (Jackson, 1960, p. 64). Similarly, he wrote to his father to say (May 14, 1864), "I want you to send me the Gazette every week, for I find some very interesting reading in it" (Jackson, 1960, p. 174).

Other soldiers sent similar sentiments. Second Lieutenant Samuel Burney wrote his wife Elizabeth to say (February 20, 1862), "The rainy days are very dull. I read in my Bible and what papers we can get ahold of" (Turner, 2002, p. 126). Similarly, on September 25, 1861, Major Henry Livermore Abbott wrote to his mother Caroline to ask her to "send me *Vanity Fair* every week, will you? The last was delightful" (Scott, 1991, p. 49).

Magazines especially offered a possible shared experience for enjoyment and entertainment. Union officer Robert Gould Shaw wrote to his sister Susie in 1861, "Have you seen the 'punch' that has the illustrations, songs, &c. about Bull Run? Mr. Hughes' article, which I read to-day, is consoling" (Duncan, 1992, p. 141).

Reading a magazine or a newspaper was one way to relax. Joseph Hopkins wrote his father (April 17, 1862), "The great army lay quietly at ease on its back in the shade, writing home, or smoking pipe, or reading a paper" (Messent & Courtney, 2006, p. 11).

Media Dependency Themes

Researchers here found that with the crisis of an all-out Civil War, soldiers' use of newspapers and magazines indeed related to the contemporary aspects of media dependency. Media dependency was one way to understand the war's impact. With a high need especially following the battle crises, there was a

reliance on understanding—not necessarily self-understanding but rather a general understanding of the war and specific battles. This study also found references to orientation of the war as to actions and decisions both individually and in general. The press accounts were needed as part of the motivation to act.

Even if the newspapers were filled with lies and mistakes, there were few media information alternatives. Like contemporary studies, soldiers depended on any kind of media: whether from an enemy publication, religious tracts, women's fashion magazines, or magazine features for entertainment in general, as escapism, and as a way for individuals to relax.

By examining Civil War soldiers' letters, new types of media dependency emerged, such as a validation of what had been experienced. There also was reliance upon press accounts to tell what happened better than the soldier could write himself. There was a need to check the coverage for agreement or disagreement. An additional dependency theme was emotional longing, a type of homesickness that local newspapers could fulfill as part of the soldiers' community. When the traditional norms of society had been in a state of flux, the Civil War need for mass media was noted by soldiers.

Last, it was surprising to learn of the source of media: the newspapers sent by family, passed around by officers, and even exchanged between the Rebels and the Yankees along with coffee and tobacco. Media dependency meant that all sides needed news coverage of what had been experienced. Beyond sharing, the more educated soldiers acting as correspondents sent their own accounts to the newspapers and alerted their families to be on the lookout for those articles.

Soldier's letters connected them to their families and friends, but references to newspapers and magazines showed types of importance and dependency to reduce ambiguity and continue some semblance of normalcy of their prewar lives. This research has indicated how media dependency could historically find similar patterns in contemporary studies and add new themes to be explored, especially under war conditions.

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